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WOMEN'S FIT TO THE CONTEMPORARY IDEAL WORKER IMAGE

Experiences from technology consulting

Master's Thesis
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Extensive research in the field of diversity and inclusion has attested the value in diversity for organisations through higher levels of engagement, teamwork and innovation, and furthermore, by achieving financial success and technological advancement with improved products and services. However, as understanding of diversity and inclusion has increased, certain industries are continuing to statistically reveal scarcity of women in the workforce.

Academic discussion around the underrepresentation of women in the workforce has strived to understand the lack of gender diversity and women's stalled advancement in male-gendered industries. The idealised image of the worker as a male character is believed to be one of the key constructs holding back women's fit to the professional work domain. The purpose of this study is to draw implications for the scarcity of women in male-gendered industries through exploring the current ideal worker image and its connection to the organisational culture type in the intersection of business and technology workforce.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded on the ideal worker image and the competing values framework, indicating the impact of organisational culture type on the idealised image of the worker. Through a qualitative research method this thesis is built around searching the qualities of the ideal worker image and the characteristics of the working culture in contemporary technology consulting industry, and furthermore, on finding how the contemporary ideal worker image and the working culture support or hinder female inclusion in the research context. For this explorative study fourteen interviews were conducted with women in the Finnish technology consulting industry.

The findings of this study propose that the contemporary ideal worker image created, recreated and sustained by the contemporary organisational culture type is considerably differing from the organisational culture type reflected by the traditional ideal worker image. This study contributes to the existing literature by suggesting that the ideal worker image and the organisational culture type in this researched context are shifting. The gathered findings of this study propose that the remains of the traditional worker image are acting as a barrier for the transformation to a novel organisational culture that is more inclusive for women and supportive to female representation and advancement in professional work domains.

Keywords ideal worker image, gender, diversity and inclusion, organisational culture, Finnish technology consulting industry

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tiivistelmä

Diversiteetin ja iklusiivisuuden saralla tehdyt tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet niiden arvon organisaatioissa korkeampien osallistumisasteiden, tiimityöskentelyn ja innovaation myötä sekä vaikuttamalla taloudellisen menestykseen ja teknologisen kehityksen saavuttamiseen edistyksellisempien tuotteiden ja palveluiden kautta. Diversiteetin ja inklusiivisuuden ymmärryksen kasvusta huolimatta tietyillä liiketoiminta-aloilla on kuitenkin edelleen todettu naisten vähäistä osallistumista työvoimaan.

Akateeminen keskustelu naisten aliedustuksesta työelämässä on pyrkinyt ymmärtämään sukupuolidiversiteetin puutetta sekä naisten etenemisen hidastumista ja estymistä miesvaltaisilla aloilla. Yhdeksi tähän ilmiöön vaikuttavaksi tekijäksi on esitetty perinteistä ideaalityöntekijän kuvaa, johon yhdistetyt piirteet ovat usein olleet miespuolista henkilöä kuvaavia. Tämän kuvan ideaalityöntekijästä mieshenkilönä on uskottu olevan yksi tärkeimmistä rakenteista esteenä naisten sopivuudelle ammatillisilla alueilla. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on ymmärtää naisten aliedustusta miesvaltaisilla aloilla ideaalityöntekijän kuvan ja organisaatiokulttuurityyppien kautta teknologian ja kaupan alojen leikkauspisteessä.

Tämän tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys pohjautuu ideaalityöntekijän kuvaan sekä kilpailevien arvojen viitekehykseen tuoden näkyväksi organisaatiokulttuurityypin vaikutuksen ideaalityöntekijän kuvaan. Kvalitatiivisen tutkimusmetodin kautta tässä pro gradu -työssä pyritään etsimään ideaalityöntekijän kuvaa sekä organisaatiokulttuuria heijastavia ominaisuuksia nykyisellä teknologiakonsultointialalla sekä löytämään kuinka nämä tukevat tai pidättelevät naisten osallistumista tutkimuskontekstissa. Tähän tutkivaan työhön suoritettiin neljätoista haastattelua teknologiakonsultointialalla Suomessa työskentelevien naisten kanssa.

Löydökset viittaavat, että nykyinen organisaatiokulttuurityypin muodostama ja ylläpitämä ideaalityöntekijän kuva eroaa merkittävästi siitä organisaatiokulttuurityypistä, joka ilmentää perinteistä ideaalityöntekijän kuvaa. Tämä tutkimus edistää olemassa olevaa tutkimusta ehdottamalla, että ideaalityöntekijän kuva ja organisaatiokulttuurityyppi ovat muuttumassa. Lisäksi tutkimus toteaa, että perinteisen ideaalityöntekijän kuvan jäänteet voivat toimia esteinä muutokselle kohti uutta organisaatiokulttuurityyppiä, joka on inklusiivisempi naisille sekä tukee naisten edustusta ja etenemistä ammatillisilla alueilla.

Avainsanat ideaalityöntekijän kuva, sukupuoli, diversiteetti ja inklusiivisuus, organisaatiokulttuuri, suomalainen teknologiakonsultointiala

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1 INTRODUCTION

Finland has long been known for its technology knowledge and skills - one of the many national prides of our country. But as we imagine the bright and talented leaders and executives of uprising innovative technology companies in the beginning of the millennium, we might not think of women. This is because the technology industry has historically been dominated by men, and especially, male engineers. While almost two decades have passed, not much has changed. A study conducted by Inklusiiv in the spring of 2019 revealed that we still have only 28% of women employees across all functions in technology companies in Finland. The lowest count of women in the survey was 11% of a single company's workforce (Inklusiiv, 2019). The statistics are painting a picture that the Finnish technology industry is not an inclusive and available field for everyone to succeed in, regardless of gender.

Extensive research studying the phenomenon of women as minority and their underrepresentation especially in male-gendered industries has strived to understand the underlying issues hindering women's success and advancement in these professional domains. While talk has simultaneously increased, we do not yet fully understand why the values of gender equality are not reflected in reality through statistics. Divergent streams of literature have aimed to develop theories drawing from gender role expectations to work and family dilemmas and struggles on managing boundaries between life domains. Furthermore, the theory of the ideal worker image suggests that the characteristics and traits that business organisations are idealising in a worker remain assigned to men while women struggle conforming to this image (Acker, 1990; Turco, 2010; Reid, 2011; Reid, 2015; Ramarajan & Reid, 2015). This idealised image of the worker as a male character is believed to be one of the key constructs prevailing women's fit to the professional domain.

The interest and motivation for this study is rising from two perspectives. Firstly, gender equality is a moral discussion, one I believe we should not still be having in 2020. Secondly, homogeneous workplaces and workforces are having an effect on the outputs as products, services and end solutions are tailored for needs from the same perspective of an undiverse group. Therefore, gender equality should be among the top priorities of strategic initiatives for companies, both as socially responsible institutions and as innovative organisations seeking for financial success and technological advancement.

1.1 Background and motivations for research problem

Behind the growing support for gender inequality is the momentum diversity and inclusion have gained in the recent decades in business both as a business case and as a moral case. Companies worldwide now recognise the spectrum of benefits that can be yielded when the company culture is genuinely appreciative of its workforce's diversity. The advancement has been steady towards bringing diversity into conversations in both academic discussions as well as in the daily business life.

Despite increasing talk, certain industries are lagging behind in the advancement. Decades of academic research has strived to find the issues underlying the underrepresentation of women in workplaces. Recent studies reveal this to hold true especially for the technology industry. While 90% of European tech companies agree that having a diverse team is a benefit for the company performance, yet 93% of the capital invested in European tech start-up companies went to all-male founding teams in 2017 (Atomico, 2018). There seems to be a gap between intentions and reality. Consistently, it seems that not only the start-up companies have the tendency to consider women as a minority. In fact, the whole European tech community appears to be dominated by men, as women are accounted for just 22% of all participants (Atomico, 2018). When we take into account the rapid technology acceleration, it is worth asking, is the future also in the hands of a homogeneous workforce?

If technology is considered as an entitlement for specific demographic groups, we might lose the potential of innovation and talent that lies within diversity. Therefore, it raises a concern about how much talent passes in Finland each year due to the homogeneous workforce. The technology field is characterised by its disruptive, innovative force, taking on a number of the world's biggest problems in the modern era. Technology is fighting diseases, advancing the revolution of biotech, and continuously connecting nations from the furthest corners of Earth while enhancing our understanding of each other as human beings. Could the field itself stand up for one of the most persistent injustices of modern time – gender inequality?

1.2 Research objectives and relevance

This qualitative research explores women's experiences and perspectives in the male-gendered technology context as well as women's fit to the ideal worker image. As the underlying explanations for the persistence of gender inequality (Padavic, Ely & Reid, 2019) and the gender imbalance especially found in the IT profession (Gorbacheva et al., 2019) still remain poorly understood, perhaps this study can bring new and fruitful suggestions for further research. Moreover, as we have only limited research on the actual experiences of women in technology, and especially in the context of Finnish technology industry, this thesis is interested in finding narratives.

I will strive to explore the characteristics of the contemporary ideal worker image and organisational culture in technology consulting to better understand the underlying reasons of women's underrepresentation in this industry. Particularly, this study aims to find implications of how the social constructs of the ideal worker image and working culture type are supporting and advancing (or challenging and hindering) women's success in the technology industry. The specific research questions guiding this process are formed as follows:

- What are the qualities of an ideal worker image in contemporary technology consulting industry?
- What are the characteristics of the contemporary working culture in technology consulting?
- How do the contemporary ideal worker image and working culture support or hinder female inclusion in technology consulting?

The proposed problem has not yet been empirically researched as a qualitative study in this specific targeted context. As the workplace is an essential institution in creating and maintaining gender norms (Acker, 1990), studying women in this context is crucial in uncovering pain points associated to gender. Furthermore, individuals are significantly shaping their identities through the creation, recreation and sustaining of idealised images in the organisational culture (Reid, 2011), proposing the importance of linkages between culture and the ideal worker image. Therefore, the theoretical goal of this study is to find implications for gender imbalance from both the theory base of previous research and the empirical implications of real-life experiences to better understand women's conformation

to the contemporary ideal worker image and its insights for the gender imbalance in the technology industry in Finland.

1.3 Structure of this study

This study is structured into three main sections. Firstly, I will cover existing research relevant for the context of gender diversity and women in technology industry explaining how these areas of organisational research have contributed to our understanding of embracing diversity and inclusion. Following the explanations academics have found for women's underrepresentation in the workforce, I combine the discussion to form a narrative suggested by existing literature, guiding the reader to the core topic of the ideal worker image. The literature review will conclude with the theoretical framework presenting the connection between the ideal worker image and organisational culture types.

Secondly, I will briefly discuss the methodological viewpoints this research has been conducted from. This section will present the research strategy describing the utilised methods and approaches before moving on to the empirical findings of this study, presented through a narrative formed by conducted interviews.

The third section reveals similarities and discrepancies between my findings and existing literature in discussion. Finally, the concluding remarks will cover practical implications arising from these findings, analysis of the evaluation and ethical consideration of the study followed by suggestions for future research.

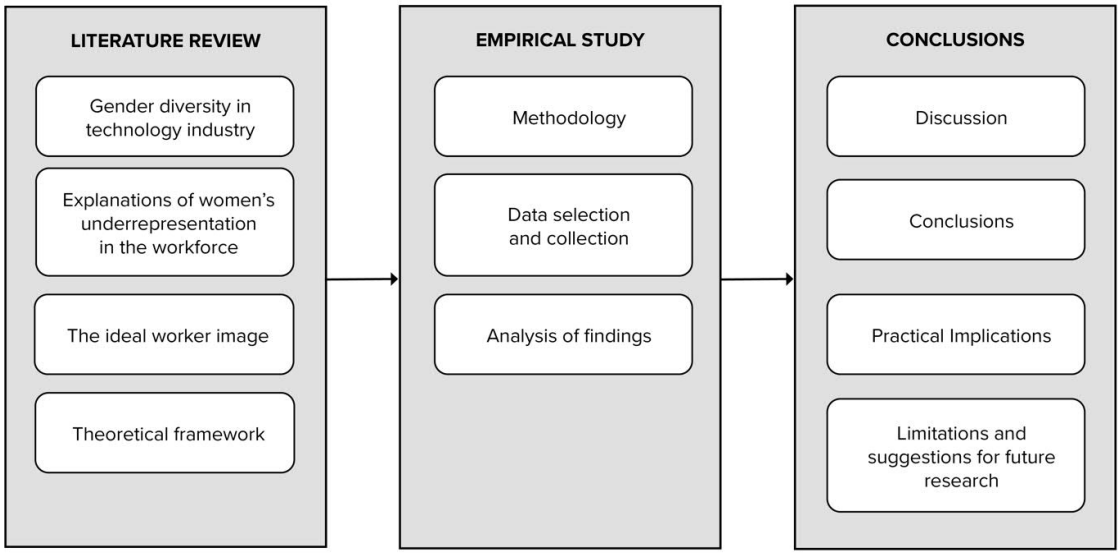

Figure 1 Structure of this study

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is focused on building the theoretical background to understand women's fit to the ideal worker image. There are three literature streams that closely relate to my study aiming to understand women's experiences as minority in the Finnish technology industry. First, there are decades of developing general research focused on gender as a form of diversity and women especially, in the male-gendered technology context. Secondly, there is a number of theories and relevant discussion in the range of gender issues, and the potential underlying forces affecting women's scarcity in the workplace. And thirdly, a theory of the ideal worker covers the traits and abilities that constitute the reflection of what is seen as desirable for a worker and their fit to business organisations. The academic literature researched in this study has covered both qualitative and quantitative approaches conducted with a variety of participants from different countries and continents. This chapter will conclude with a reflection on the insights and key concepts most relevant to this study.

2.1 Gender diversity in technology industry

The first literature stream relevant for this study is focused on finding on one hand the benefits and on the other hand, the challenges faced by the increasing understanding of diversity in the workforce. As women have traditionally been seen as a minority group in many business industries, covering this theme is essential in understanding the reasons behind the increasing talk about underrepresentation of any minority group. This chapter looks into how research in this stream has evolved from societal diversity pressures into understanding and embracing the real need for inclusiveness and integration, how gender specifically as a form of diversity has been approached in academic discussions and how women are still representing a minority group in the technology industry.

2.1.1 From diversity to inclusion

In academic discussions, diversity literature started in the 80s when demographic changes started to change the workforce dramatically (Johnston, 1987). The next decade focused on studying first the surface level diversity such as age, gender and ethnicity (Cox, Lobel &McLeod, 1991; McLeod, Lobel & Cox, 1996; Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1992), and also

deeper level diversity such as values, attitudes and skills (Harrison, Price & Bell, 1998; Milliken & Martins, 1996). The academic discussion researched benefits and challenges of diversity. In the 90s, diversity started to have more evidence for competitiveness and the "value-in-diversity" hypothesis (Cox & Blake, 1991). Although, research across the past decades had concluded that diverse groups in general face more conflicts (Ayoko & Konrad, 2012), it was understood that by focusing efforts on the management aspect of diversity, significant competitive advantage could be yielded by increased innovation and creative problem-solving (Cox & Blake, 1991; Richard, 2000; Kossek & Pichler, 2007).

After researchers started to focus exploring ways to integrate the diverse workforce, the discussion shifted towards inclusion in the 2000s (Shore et al. 2011). The research started to shape from accepting that individuals are different to creating an atmosphere of inclusion and making commitments to valuing diversity (Shen et al. 2009). Empirical evidence was put forward showing that inclusiveness was an essential part of racial and gender diversity, having a real effect on the company performance in management (Shore et al. 2011). Scholars widely accepted that to find the benefits of diversity, organisations would need to promote inclusiveness, collectivism, and appreciation of individual differences (Kalinoski et al. 2013).

A considerable amount of literature has focused on finding effective ways of managing diversity (Donnelly, 2015). In other words, ways of coping with the tensions and challenges underlying the human resources point of view. Most popularly, the different dimensions of organisational behaviour have focused for example on exploring diversity training (Anand et al. 2008; Kalinoski et al. 2013), developing frameworks for enhancing and fostering inclusion in the diverse workplace (Richard et al. 2013), and research on stereotypes, attitude and bias (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Dover et al. 2016).

Gender is one of the most prevailing forms of diversity. As for example, 51% of the European population are women (Eurostat, 2019), they represent a potential demographic group which is easily available to tap into. Furthermore, local integration into the workforce would not raise issues and bring upon challenges that for example race, ethnicity and culture as forms of diversity can face. Therefore, the absence of women in organisations has been intriguing to many scholars and a variety of research fields.

In business spectrum, especially, studies of the boardroom gender diversity have gained substantial momentum, and scholars have made evident that female representation in top management can have considerable impacts for the performance and profitability for companies (Deszö & Ross, 2012). Furthermore, gender diversity has revealed to be significant especially for innovative companies and developing teams working on radical innovations (Deszö & Ross, 2012; Diaz-García et al., 2013). In general, it has been argued that companies can benefit from increased revenue, customer base, market share and profits by having more gender diversity (Herring, 2009). Recently a worldwide study by McKinsey showed that gender diversity on executive teams in top quartile companies resulted in a 21% increase to outperform competitors by both margin and long-term value (Hunt et al. 2018). This suggests that women have significant value and power for financial performance to bring to organisations across industries.

The academic discussion around gender diversity has repeatedly proven to be greater than a moral case. Even though, equality as a worldwide megatrend would push companies to advancing the careers of women, scholars and industry professionals have also repeatedly made the business case argument for gender diversity. The modern society has the best intentions and technical knowledge on ways to approach gender diversity, at least this is the common level of our understanding. The truth, however, still reflects different values as we look into several different operational areas of business in practice. Women still have only losing statistical chance in hiring situations (Johnson, Hekman & Chang, 2016) and stereotypes prevail further also in compensation, performance evaluation and promotion decisions (Koch et al. 2015). This suggests, that even when organizations are aware of the problem and have the best intentions in taking incremental changes, the strong cultural stereotypes extended in practice can still lead us to believe that men are essentially more competent than women (Koenig et al. 2011), leaving women to minority.

2.1.2 Women in technology

Technology is one controversial industry, where we see rapid growth and high levels of education, yet continually low levels of female representation. Over the past decades we have seen the information technology industry increasing exponentially, which also correlates with the increasing demand for its workforce (Gorbacheva et al. 2019). To benefit from this development and the variety of different viewpoints the workforce

potentially can withhold, diversity could be seen as the golden ticket. However, a growing amount of research continues to repeat the same message: minority groups are still widely underrepresented in the tech industry. Research reveals that even though we have advanced from mere accepting of diversity to actually embracing inclusion, and businesses better understand the arguments for actively taking steps to improve representation of different forms of diversity, there are still many minority groups remaining widely unrepresented, women especially.

The statistics show that even though, women represent 51% of the Finnish population and 48% of the general workforce in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2018), women count for only 28% of employees across all functions in the technology industry in Finland (Inklusiiv, 2019). Conversely, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality, Finland ranks fourth on the Gender Equality Index in the EU (EIGE, 2019). Consistently, the Society of Human Resource Management and the Economist Intelligence Unit stated in their global diversity and inclusion report (2009) already over ten years ago that Finland is among seven of the most socially inclusive countries ranking fifth globally on the diversity readiness index. Finland has the readiness and the potential, however, this readiness is not reflected in reality. Why?

In academia the underrepresentation of women has been widely studied as a global phenomenon. There has been research on job satisfaction, job turnover (Sumner & Niederman, 2004), career experiences (Crump, Logan & McIlroy, 2007) and career development (Trauth, 2009). A variety of different inclusion strategies to recruit women to technology (Lagesen, 2007) have been discussed. Recruiting is one part of the problem but more significantly, scholars have found that women's stalled advancement opportunities (Armstrong et al. 2007), also known as the glass ceiling (Cotter et al., 2001; Liff & Ward, 2001) was characterising for women in technology (Lemons & Parzinger, 2001) and resulted in voluntary turnover (Armstrong et al. 2007). This considerable stream of research has uncovered a variety of areas that are problematic and challenging for women.

However, despite the years of studies and the interventions companies worldwide are taking on, progress for gender diversity in both information technology education, academia and the workforce has barely been made (Gorbacheva et al. 2019). The academic discussion has been focusing on the problems of recruitment and the retention of women in technology field while preserving the assumption that we are in possession of the

necessary tools and means to fundamentally understand the lack of gender diversity and further, that we know how to apply this knowledge (Gorbacheva et al. 2019). In light of how it relates to practice, we might actually need to revise our understanding of the matter.

There is a strong stance of arguments for the value of gender diversity in the IT-workforce for finding undiscovered creativity (Trauth, 2011), innovativeness and problem-solving ability (Kirton & Robertson, 2018). Olbrich, Trauth, Niedermann, and Gregor (2015) argued for the general necessity of gender diversity benefits spreading from social sciences to IT-related studies. However, in academia the underlying discourse is not well grounded on a coherent explanation for the imbalance and why the impact of the interventions taken is not converting to reality. Regardless of the growing body of research on the value of gender diversity, it is still largely unknown why women are in fact underrepresented in the technology industry and how effective interventions can be developed to tackle this issue (Gorbacheva et al. 2019). To understand the underrepresentation of women and the potential glass ceiling, the academic discussion needs more research on the fundamental reasons why.

2.2 Explanations of women's underrepresentation in the workforce

The second stream of this literature review uncovers the theories of suggested explanations to the underrepresentation of women in the workforce. In the 1970s and 1980s white women especially, made significant progress in advancing to more powerful positions at work due to the increase of the societal and legal pressures of discrimination, however, in the beginning of the 2000s most of the gains stopped when gender bias and stereotyping prevailed the pressures for change (Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). This stagnation has been the key factor for gender inequality in the workforce (Padavic et al. 2019). The New York Times reported in 2015 that within all the CEO's of the S&P 500 companies there were more CEO's who were named John (5,3%) than there were CEO's who were women (4,1%). In the latest report (Catalyst, 2019) women hold 27 (5,4%) of CEO positions at S&P 500 companies. Therefore, in 4 years the progress has been 1,3% and further, there are now more women CEO's than there are men CEO's who are named John. The change is nevertheless slow and rates of women in high power positions are still alarmingly low. As we are entering the 2020s, we are increasingly trying to break the barriers of women's stalled advancement and looking for the underlying reasons why.

There is unison and shared statements about gender inequality, however, its persistence remains unclear (Padavic et al. 2019).

2.2.1 Gender role expectations

Several theories have approached and discussed possible explanations why gender inequality sticks. Firstly, decades of research have focused on discovering and understanding the differences between men and women, and further, the social role expectations and attitudes associated with them. One of the oldest and most renown theories linked into the discussion is the social role theory by Eagly (1987), which states that gender roles are normative beliefs about the attributes of men and women, and that certain described qualities or behavioural tendencies are believed to be desirable for each sex. Eagly (1987) further presented that these certain qualities and tendencies for gender roles entail that men are expected to be more agentic reflecting their independency, assertiveness and control, while women are expected to be more communal reflecting emotions and sensitivity and their natural tendency to take care of others. For example, assertiveness in men is seen as ideal and normative behaviour for men, while the same assertiveness in women is thought of as inappropriate for gender-based expectations and even might be perceived in a derogatory manner (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007). Furthermore, the components of gender stereotypes include the descriptive component, which defines what women and men are like, and the prescriptive component describing what women and men should be like (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

These gender role expectations and stereotypes influence the kind of jobs seen as appropriate for women and men and moreover, the ideal behaviour assigned to each gender in the context of work (Cuadagno & Cialdini, 2007). Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs and Tamkins (2004) in their paper of three experimental studies with over 240 participants stated:

> "Although there is a good fit between what the woman is perceived to be like and what the job is thought to entail, there is a bad fit between what the woman is perceived to be like and the conception of what she should be like." (Heilman et al. 2004, p. 417)

Therefore, even when women are perceived to fit a specific job, it comes across as a violation of the stereotypic prescription when the specific job is typically male gender-

typed or includes male gender-typed tasks. The gender role theories and differences between men and women have also clear effects on how individuals behave at work. Guadagno and Cialdini (2007) conclude in their qualitative literature review that men in general are using specific impression management tactics more consistent with the masculine gender role, such as self-promotion and taking responsibility for positive occurrences, whereas women use tactics more consistent with the feminine gender role, such as modesty and expressing opinions or behaviour similar to others.

Since men are usually rewarded for their traditionally masculine-typed behaviour (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007), the expected roles and behaviour between men and women can become problematic in an organisational setting. Heilman (et al. 2004) finds that in traditionally male-gendered domains information of women being successful results in them being more personally derogated and generally less liked. Although, women adopt a more masculine manner and strive to be perceived as more assertive, as this violates the gender role expectations it may result in negative consequences instead of rewards, as it does with men (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007; Heilman et al. 2004). Negative perception about successful women and being disliked strongly influences the overall evaluations, salary and job opportunities (Heilman et al. 2004). Consistently, Heilman and Okimoto (2007) validated beyond earlier studies that in the core of the negative reactions towards successful women was the perceived deficiency in their communality. Therefore, women face a dilemma whether they should violate the norms based on gender roles or the roles of their work context as both of them result in being either disliked or unsuccessful.

The implications of the social role theory and normative descriptions of gender differences for this study is that women can potentially face excessive challenges in organizational settings due to the negative reactions of the perceived descriptive and prescriptive roles of women. The extensive literature review by Heilman (2012) reveals that gender bias is rooted in gender stereotypes relevantly suggesting towards the scarcity of women, especially, at the upper level organizational positions, which have traditionally been reserved for men. The paradox in the discussion remains: when women seek male gender-typed positions, they risk the perception of incompetence, but when women strive to break the stereotypical frame they are stuck in, there is considerable yet unnecessary backlash. Finally, if women manage to overcome these obstacles and rise the organisational ladder, hence succeed, they are disliked and undesired in the work context.

2.2.2 The family-work narratives

Another widely accepted explanation for the underrepresentation of women in the organisational context has been found from the narratives linked to the conflict of family and work. Hays (1996) proposed in her renowned book about the disparity between 'intensive mothering' and the work ethic, that the western culture pressures women to dedicate and expend a huge amount of energy and time in raising their children while still working away from home, a burden which is undoubtedly carried by mostly women. Women are expected to find their fulfilment in family and men from work. Consequently, women are perceived to invest less in their human capital because the majority of women value family over career, leading to expectations that taking care of family needs as prior responsibility reduces women's commitment to work and the organisation (Roth, 2006). Being a mother and valuing the family life can prevent women from being seen as a desirable employee (Turco, 2010).

As research has revealed considerable gender gaps in the organisational context, redesigning work (Perlow & Kelly, 2014) is gaining momentum and a variety of work and family policies are increasing women's job satisfaction (Butts, Casper & Yang, 2013). These policies appear offered more often within markets where women are highly educated and they have high representation in managerial positions (Ruppanner & Huffman, 2012). Further, the gender pay gap is smaller when there are more women represented in the workforce (Cohen & Huffman, 2003; Cotter et al., 1997). Overall, it seems that it is beneficial for women as a group when they are better represented (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015).

Behind the work and family policies and work redesign is the assumption that women do not want increasingly meaningful tasks or challenging assignments, because the long working hours are intervening with the family life (Padavic et al. 2019). However, most women who have achieved top management positions have simultaneously been taking care of their families, as have their male colleagues. Solely long working hours conflicting with women's family obligations is a myth needed to overcome (Padavic et al. 2019; Ely, Stone & Ammerman, 2014). In fact, Padavic et al. (2019) suggest that the work-family explanation is essentially neglecting the fact that men are advancing in their careers while they can also experience the conflict between work and family. Therefore, the long working hours are not harmful only for women, but men suffer as well, while women pay the higher price. Padavic et al. (2019) corroborate that the family-work narrative is created

by a wider 24/7 culture and as such should not be used as an explanation to women's lack of success as primarily women's problem. Rather, findings suggest that underneath lies psychodynamic desires and conflicts, which make the domain even more challenging to navigate.

2.2.3 The boundaries between work and life domains

The family-work contexts are one of the most commonly used disparity subjects to different life domains in organisational research. Another role theory developed already in the 60s and 70s by renown identity researchers (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978) addresses how individuals can balance between the responsibilities and the rights which are brought by their positions in a variety of social structures. This theory is particularly fruitful for understanding the shaping of individual's boundaries between the personal and professional roles and the experiences of conflict (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). The experience of conflicting roles is not necessarily restricted to family and work domains. The ability to meet the perceived requirements of one role, for example the work identity, can still be conflicting in individuals' personal life regardless of the family scenario. Role conflict is faced when the expectations or demands from one role become interfering for the ability to meet the expectations or demands of another role (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Consequently, decades later, in the beginning of 2000s the transition between these boundaries became of interest as everyday life became increasingly mediated through formality in organisational settings (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate (2000) presented the boundary theory through the means individuals' roles can be arrayed from *segmentation* to *integration*. They argued, that on the one hand, segmentation can decrease the blurring between roles but also the transition between these roles can become more difficult. On the other hand, integration of the boundaries can provide simpler transitions between domains, more flexibility and allows the handling of multiple roles simultaneously, leading to efficiency.

Blurred lines can in different contexts, however, become more difficult to manage. The extent to which the individual is comfortable in matching one's boundary management strategy (integration or segmentation) with the organisation's desired take on the balance between the two domains of personal and professional life, becomes crucial in defining the

imperative of fit (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Employees need to have the command over their boundaries.

2.3 The ideal worker image

The third stream highly related to my study is focused on discussing the ideal worker image. It has been suggested that a gendered image of an ideal worker has significant power in maintaining gender inequality in workplaces (Acker, 1990; Turco 2010). Acker's research (1990) establishes that organisations look for employees as "ideal workers", who essentially have no other obligations outside the work domain, and are fully committed and available to the organisation. Moreover, this image most traditionally has been descriptive to men while women typically have strayed from the ideal worker image. While workplaces have changed from Acker's early research, the expectations of employees' full devotion to the organisation and the ability to be available for work are holding their ground. In other words, the ideal of a worker has been suggested to persists as having a singular focus on work (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Furthermore, identities constructed by individuals for work context can carry over images to organisational cultures by creating, recreating and sustaining these ideals (Reid, 2011), bringing organisational culture into the discussion.

2.3.1 Men and women as ideal workers

Acker (1990) claims that while men fit to the image of an ideal worker, women are struggling to conform and face penalties for responsibilities conflicting with their availability and commitment for work. This struggle has vastly been dissected in the academic discussions, as one of the most crucial factors for men continuing to outperform women.

Contrary to the traditional suggestions of men and women's fit to the ideal image, a more recent research by Reid (2011) amplifies that many men do not need to fully conform to the ideal worker image either, while remaining in consideration as a desired employee. Reid (2011) suggests, that men are able to deviate by masking identities and passing as ideal, while women fall short from being considered as a top performer by the organisation. This suggests that gender inequality in organisations is not simply a result of women's lack of conformance to the ideal image while men succeed in the fit, but instead,

men have more success than women in deviating from the image of the ideal worker. Therefore, fitting the ideal worker and the arising conflicts are not simply restricted to women.

Dumas & Sanchez-Burks (2015) posit that the expectation of work as employees' priority over all other commitment is encouraging individuals to integrate the personal domain with the professional domain while validating the precedence of work, whereas bringing nuances of personal life into the professional domain is discouraged and seen as undermining performance at work.

2.3.2 Navigating through identity domains

The ideal worker image raises concerns about how much workers experience conflicts between their true selves and the preferred ideal employee. Stets and Burke (2000) outlined identity formation as:

> "The self is reflexive in that it can take itself an object and can categorise, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications."

This process of identity formation in social identity theory is called *self-categorisation* and in identity theory *identification* (Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, individuals form a set of social identities, a unique combination of categories and roles of identification. These multiple identities are constantly developing within aspects of social life (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Especially, work-related identities and how organisations influence individuals' identity formation has been of significant interest for management research (Reid, 2015), however, the role identities outside the organisational context are also gaining foothold. Specifically, interesting for this research perspective are contradictions between individuals' personal identity and the desire to fit the ideal worker image. How do workers navigate between different identity domains? Research by Reid (2015) confirms that conflicts between the expected and experienced professional identities are resolved by individuals straying from the expected identity and instead remaining loyal to their experienced identities. Reid's (2015) field study of a consulting firm presents a conceptual model on individuals coping with conflict between expected and experienced (Figure 2) identities, comprised of

organisation's mechanisms of identity control, and individuals coping with conflict between the two identities. The reproduced model in Figure 2 corroborates that people who experience conflict cope by utilising tools that allow them to diverge from the expected identity. In this figure, grey boxes highlight the organisation's identity control mechanisms, while white boxes depict conflict coping mechanisms between expected professional identity and experienced professional identity. Additionally, situational factors also have an impact on using the tools to *pass* or *reveal* the experienced identity. Consequently, model suggests that passing and revealing strategies shape senior members' perception of individuals, hence influencing the performance evaluation system resulting in awarding those who pass and penalise those who reveal.

Reid's (2015) research confirms that deviating from the ideal worker image is possible while embracing the expected professional identity of the organisation, highlighting that women's struggles on fulfilling the image of the ideal worker can also stem from differences on how men and women cope with conflict. This suggests, that deviations from the desired norm as such can be subtle and not tied to any gender, but instead, strategies for managing this straying can be more revealing to women.

Similarly, binary domains of identities have been researched in other studies. The traditional ideal worker image has focused on building the perception of the desired traits and abilities of the worker conducting a particular work (Acker, 1990), hence reflecting the work identity of the ideal employee. More recent research (e.g., Ramarajan & Reid, 2013) proposes, however, that understanding work identity construction requires exploring the control of both work and non-work identities. Non-work identities are therefore, receiving more interest and significance in efforts striving to understand how the image of the ideal worker is formed.

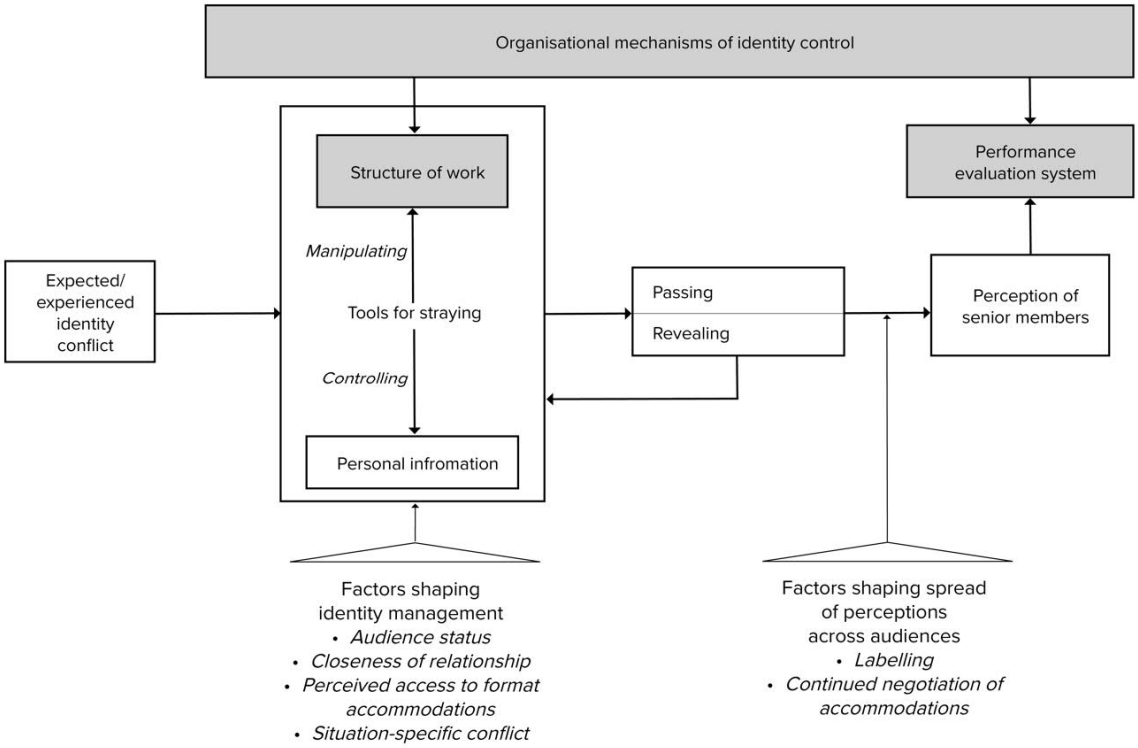

Figure 2 A model of coping with conflict between expected and experienced professional identities (Reid, 2015)

Ramarajan and Reid (2013) argue for a theory suggesting that there is a negotiation of non-work identities in relation to the pressures rising from the occupation/organisation and individuals' personal preferences. They contend for the *alignment* or *misalignment* in the dual force of inclusion and exclusion of the workers non-work identity, as individuals experience this power relationship as either enabling or as constraining. Three strategies for non-work identity management are presented: *assenting, complying, resisting,* and *inverting (*Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). The consequences represented can cover areas of work identity, individuals' wellbeing, organisational productivity and efficiency, and transformations of power relations, such as autonomy.

2.3.3 The role of working culture in shaping ideal worker image

The way workers contend to align or misalign their identities to working context, through the above-mentioned different strategies for managing non-work and work identities

(Ramarajan & Reid, 2013), are contributing to shape the ideal worker image. This image, therefore, is sustained in the culture of the organisation by the means men and women carry out their personal and professional identities (Reid, 2011). Reid (2011) further affirms that success in passing as the ideal can effectively push out most non-ideal identities from the organisational environment, which consequently influences in workers reluctancy to challenge the prevailing organisational culture. This suggests, that the ideal worker image, and transformations and changes to this image are both affected by workers and their identities, which are then recreated and sustained in the organisational culture. Therefore, these changes are most likely slow and require commitment from multiple levels of the organisation.

Culture as defined by Schein (1996) is:

> "The set of shared, taken-for granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about and reacts to its various environments."

Later on, Schein (2010) further corroborated culture as:

> "A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems."

The definitions by Schein affirm that culture is indeed constructed by the people in the organisation, and therefore, shape according to the individuals' contribution, whether conscious or unconscious. Countless theories have been suggested in previous literature on how to evaluate organisational culture, especially the competing values framework (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; s. Hartnell et al. 2011), which was chosen for a closer examination to this study as it has been widely adopted in use in both studies and practice of over 10 000 organisations globally (Cameron et al. 2006). The popularity and widespread use of the CVF culminates to its efforts in understanding the organisational culture from an effectiveness perspective (Hartnell et. al, 2011). Therefore, it is extremely suitable to discuss next to the concepts of male-gendered work and the ideal worker image, which highlight the focus on efficiency for the organisation's performance part.

Competing values framework

The competing values framework (CVF, Hartnell et al., 2011) identifies four types of cultures: *clan culture, adhocracy culture, market culture*, and *hierarchy culture*. These culture types are arrayed by *focus, structure* and the *means-ends* dimensions. (Figure 3)

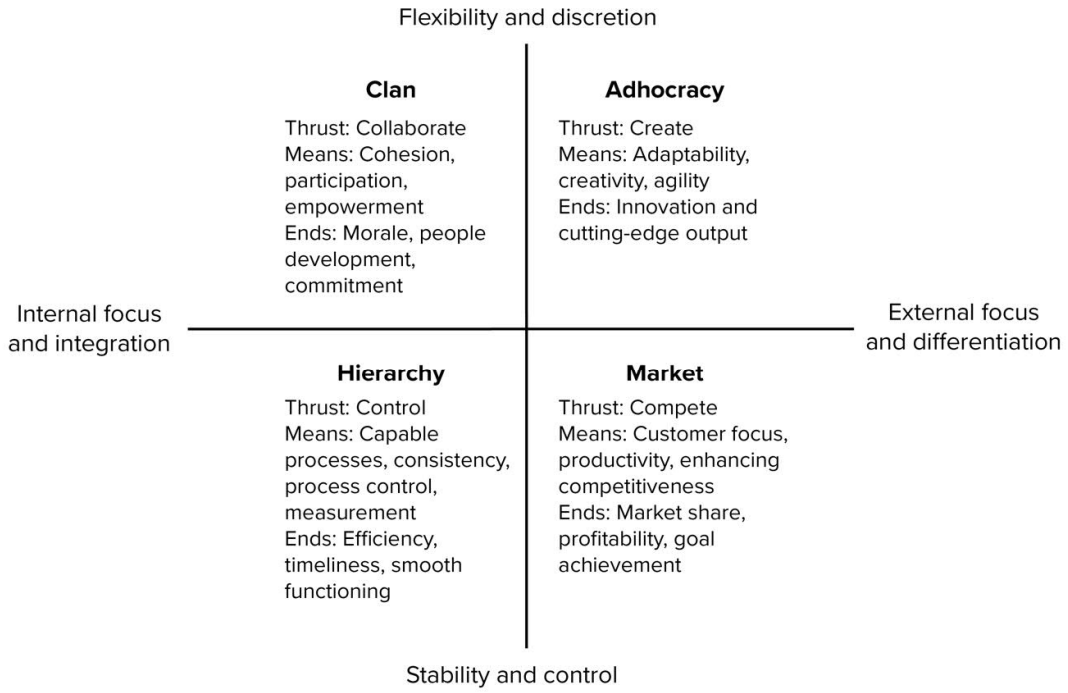

Figure 3 The competing values framework (Hartnell et al. 2011)

The first dimension, focus, presents the effectiveness criteria on an axis from internal focus and integration to external focus and differentiation. The second dimension of structure differentiates effectiveness criteria of flexibility and discretion from stability and control. Finally, the means-ends dimension describes why each culture type is characterised with a designated strategic thrust and associated with specific effectiveness criteria, stemming from the values and beliefs of the organisation. Second figure of competing values framework illustrates the four culture types and their classifying characteristics (Table 1). Figure arrays culture types based on the basic assumptions, beliefs, values, and artifacts that are descriptive to each culture type.

Culture type	Assumptions	Beliefs	Values	Artifacts (behaviours)	Effectiveness criteria
Clan	Human affiliation	People behave appropriately when they have trust in, loyalty to, and membership in the organisation	Attachment, affiliation, collaboration, trust, and support	Teamwork, participation, employee involvement, and open communication	Employee satisfaction and commitment
Adhocracy	Change	People behave appropriately when they understand the importance and impact of the task	Growth, stimulation, variety, autonomy, and attention to detail	Risk-taking, creativity, and adaptability	Innovation
Market	Achievement	People behave appropriately when they have clear objectives and are rewarded based on their achievements	Communication, competition, competence, and achievement	Gathering customer and competitor information, goal-setting, planning, task focus, competitiveness, and aggressiveness	Increased market share, profit, product quality, and productivity
Hierarchy	Stability	People behave appropriately when they have clear roles and procedures are formally defined by rules and regulations	Communication, routinisation, formalisation, and consistency	Conformity and predictability	Efficiency, timeliness, and smooth functioning

Table 1 The competing values framework's four culture types (Hartnell et al. 2011)

Based on Figure 3 and Table 1, Hartnett et al. (2011) identify key characteristics for the following four different culture types:

1) **The clan culture:** Placed in the top left quadrant, clan culture is internally oriented and reinforced by a flexible organisational structure. This culture has its foundation on human affiliation, an assumption producing people to follow best practices and reproduce desired behaviour when they have trust in, loyalty to, and membership in the organisation. Hence, positive affective employee attitudes are significant and characterising for this culture type. Clan culture believes in collaboration, trust and support through open communication and employee involvement. This kind of culture is descriptive to high levels of morale and focusing efforts on teamwork.
2) **The adhocracy culture:** Externally oriented and reinforced by a flexible organisational structure, adhocracy culture fits in the upper right corner. Adhocracy culture is grounded on believing in change as part of embracing creation and accumulation of novel ideas and resources. This culture type is idealistic in its way of encouraging members to be creative and step outside from current conventions by taking risks. Adhocratic cultures accredit growth, stimulation, variety, autonomy

and attention to detail, transferring to risk-taking, creativity and adaptability in behaviour.

3) **The market culture:** Lower right quadrant is held by externally oriented market culture, which is reinforced by control mechanisms in organisational structures. The assumption of achievement is descriptive to market culture, focusing on beliefs based on structure, clear objectives and competitiveness. This culture type is high believer in competence and clear goal setting. The underlying characteristic in market culture is that employees will perform better when they have clear targets set for them to aggressively perform against the expectations of shareholders. Focused on planning and tasks orientation, market culture aims for profit, productivity and short-term value.
4) **The hierarchy culture:** Internally oriented and supported by an organisational structure reinforced with control mechanisms, hierarchy culture is placed in the lower left quadrant. The basic assumption behind hierarchy culture is that stability through clear roles and procedures defined by rules and regulations translate to appropriate behaviour in the organisation. Hierarchy cultures value control, predictability and efficiency and therefore, clear communication, routines, formalisation and consistency will lead to efficiency and fluent operations.

The effectiveness criteria

The variety of processes and outcomes that organisational culture can have an effect on have long been a point of interest in organisational literature. Specifically, Hartnell et al. (2011) explored further the competing values framework by researching the relationships of the cultures to their organisational effectiveness criteria: *employee attitudes*, *operational effectiveness*, and *financial effectiveness*. Through the lens of effectiveness criteria Hartnell et al. (2011) researched from the above mentioned four culture types the following three: clan culture, adhocracy culture, and market culture.

1. **Employee attitudes:** The main drivers for values in clan cultures are attachment, affiliation, trust and support. Clan cultures are descriptive in members valuing teamwork, participating in decision making, and engaging in open communication, collectively creating a sense of ownership and responsibility for the members of the organisation. Clan cultures are associated with positive employee attitudes on unit-

level. As adhocracy cultures are high in autonomy and participation lies heavily on individual's competency, preparedness and motivation on the activity, the relationship between adhocracy cultures an employee attitudes are suggested as positive, however, less positive than with clan culture. With market cultures, positive employee attitudes are dependent on members and units achieving the goals set for them. However, as competition and assertiveness are highly present in this culture, collective employee attitudes can be hurt by distrust and pursuing of self-interests, further having a negative effect on collective employee attitudes. Therefore, it is suggested that clan cultures have a significantly stronger positive relationship as varying group dynamics in adhocracy and market cultures can diminish the direct impact of positive unit-level employee attitudes.

2. **Operational effectiveness:** Clan cultures as highly cohesive groups can be more prone to groupthink and, therefore, less likely to come forward with pioneering ideas. On the other hand, clan cultures can improve product and service quality through open feedback, sharing and collaboration receptive to identifying and strengthening weaknesses. Adhocracy cultures prioritise strategic efforts around innovation by creating new solutions for products, services and processes, where values of growth, stimulation, variety and autonomy are essential. Adhocracy cultures are likely to produce ground-breaking innovations while occasionally falling short on consistency and reliability on processes. Conversely, the anticipation and emphasis on customer satisfaction and communication between stakeholders raise market cultures' abilities for creating high quality products and services. Specific targets and goals can also improve operational quality further, as they actively seek to understand, listen and react to measured goals set by client and organisational needs. Although, clear goals can improve performance, it is also noted that aggressiveness and high levels of competition can hinder the innovative strategic initiative thrusts.
3. **Financial effectiveness:** Market culture has the strongest positive relationship to financial effectiveness as this culture type prioritises profitability and growth. Efforts for example on engaging in customer service activities, competitiveness and planning on generating goals are based on harnessing external information to create higher financial performance. Clan and adhocracy cultures on the other hand, maintain a more reserved relationship to financial effectiveness than market culture, even though, the association is positive. However, cultures of clan and

adhocracy can practice initiatives towards financial effectiveness through empowerment, human resource management and group cohesion.

Considering that organisational culture type has significant impact on effectiveness on all three levels, it is worth questioning the role that the formed culture inside the organisation can act as creating and sustaining the image of the ideal worker. As suggested by Reid (2011) the success of being or appearing to be ideal constructs the culture. This ideal worker image as the backbone of the academic discussion is the foundation for understanding other theories aiming to explain the underrepresentation of women in a male-gendered industry. Linking the ideal worker image and the competing values framework, I propose that the characteristics of an organisational culture are key indicators for the ideal traits and abilities perceived as desired in a specific organisational context.

2.4 Theoretical framework

The literature review of this study concludes to synthesising the key points and insights of the theoretical background. Increasing gender diversity and the representation of women in the workforce is a promise of business and performance enhancements, and moreover, a larger moral obligation for organisations as responsible agents in society. The risk of overlooking the issues in diversity and inclusion of women can have consequences for everyday business practices in many different areas: by poorer quality in decision making and narrow group thinking to slower rates of innovation having an effect on competitive advantage, and further, resulting to the quality of products and services provided. Moreover, the lack of inclusion at the workplace can significantly impact on the wellbeing for the workers that, consequently, can have high costs for businesses and societies. On the contrary, the opportunities of increasing diversity and inclusion of women in the workforce can open opportunities for better businesses and good leadership, contributing to stronger organisations, having a massive impact on company cultures and financial performance of these organisations.

The existing literature, however, falls short on understanding and explaining why gender inequality sticks. The theories aiming to cover these issues have concluded that prevailing gender differences and stereotypes, which still assign different roles and traits for different genders are one possible explanation (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2007; Heilman, 2012;

Heilman et al. 2004). Another suggested theory is that the family and work domains are conflicting by forcing much of the family meta-work to women (Hays, 1996), who are unable to navigate as smoothly through transitioning between the boundaries of work and free time (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). In contrast, novel research (Padavic et al. 2019) confirms that merely the work-family narratives are not solely descriptive narratives to women's underrepresentation and poorer advancement, but a reflection of a larger phenomenon of a 24/7 culture harmful for others than women as well.

The academic discussion focused on understanding why gender inequality sticks in workplaces, has further found support from the theory of the ideal worker image (Acker, 1990; Turco, 2010). The traditional ideal worker image portrays a character of an individual whose single focus should be dedicated to the work organisation while other obligations outside the work domain are considered unimportant. As this perception of the ideal worker has most traditionally been associated with male traits and characteristics, women typically have fallen short from the ideal worker image. While organisations have changed, the traditional ideal worker image has been suggested to persist (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Furthermore, studies on professional and personal identity construction and their effect on organisational cultures have been proposed as shaping the ideal worker image and therefore, significantly impacting the creation, recreation and sustaining of these ideals (Reid, 2011).

Who then is the ideal worker in 2020 and how do women fit this ideal? The dynamics of power and the perception of the ideal worker are the fundamental grounds at the workplace, and therefore, the increasing presence of women, especially in higher positions, can communicate a shift from these sustaining assumptions (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). However, while the talk has increased of female underrepresentation, the statistical change has stagnated. As literature continues to struggle explaining why reality is not reflecting what we know, perhaps this study can shed light on the subject through exploring how the concept of ideal worker from the lens of women unravels in current organisations. What kind of traits and abilities are desirable for the worker in contemporary organisations, and how does the ideal worker image and working cultures support and generate experiences of female representation and inclusion in the workforce?

For this study, a modified version of the competing values framework (Hartnell et. al, 2011) was selected as a support for the backbone of the ideal worker image and the

theoretical background. The CVF reflects the values that are created, recreated and sustained in the organisational culture, hence also characteristic to the image and construction of the ideal worker and values designated to that of a desired employee. Reflecting on the literature and the traditional concept of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990), I will now explain how the traditional ideal worker can be constructed through the competing values framework, illustrated in Figure 4.

The traditional ideal worker image is dictated by the organisation and its focus on external orientation. The underlying assumption is that achievement is reached through aggressiveness and competitiveness, the assertive traits associated traditionally with men. The goals and results strived for are professional advancement and career progression, increased monetary rewards and productivity. The ideal worker image fosters competence and achievement as the primary focus of the worker should be making sure that their input for the organisation has constant outputs beneficial for the company. Therefore, the ideal worker image is descriptive of the market culture type, as reflected by the competing values framework (Hartnell et. al, 2011). This study aims to look for similarities between the modern ideal worker and the culture type it reflects based on the competing values framework. As existing literature is still unable to fully understand the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women and stalled advancement, through my data I will aim to find connections of how the ideal worker presents itself through the lens of the CVF and if this has implications for women as minority in the male-gendered intersection of business and technology workforce.

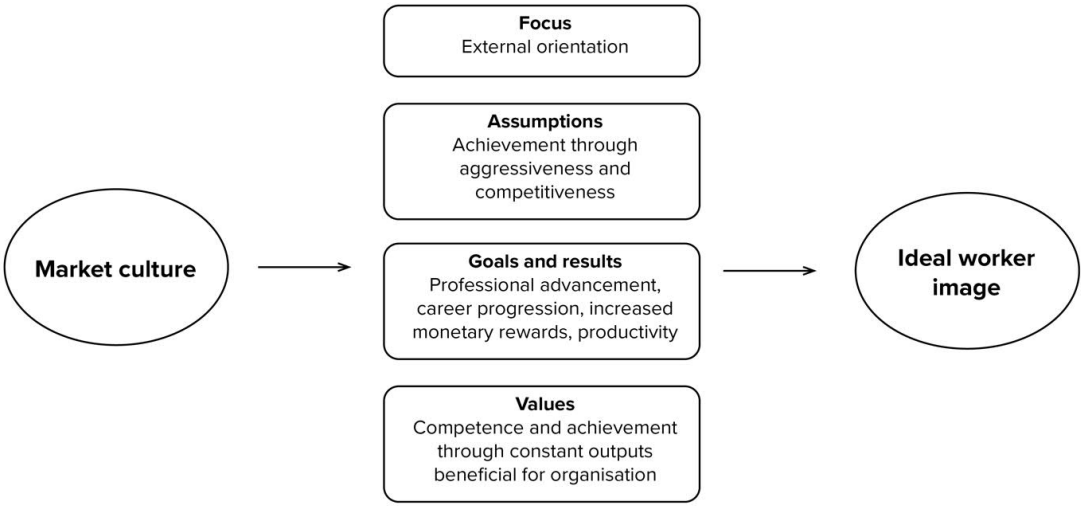

Figure 4 Ideal worker image through the competing values framework

3 METHODOLOGY

In this third chapter of my thesis I will enlighten the basis of my own ideological grounding that this study has been built on. Firstly, as my beliefs of reality are shaping my personal take on what kind of information is available out there and how I should search for this information, I will begin this chapter by outlining my perspective on epistemology. Secondly, I will shed light into the choices I have made in terms of the study method and research design. And finally, I will present the methods for data selection, collection, and analysis that I have been following working with the data used for this study.

3.1 Ideological position of the study

This study is in the end leaning on the researcher's assumptions about reality. A paradigm is a fundamental belief system guiding researchers through methodological and ideological choices and ways of study. Paradigm is the worldview defining the understanding of reality and its nature. This holistic belief system constructs the frame through which a researcher sees the problem and addresses his or her research questions. For example, the paradigms of qualitative study are different from a quantitative study by their relationship to facts, meaning of language and contexts. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

This qualitative study is grounded upon believing that facts, values and perceptions can be different to different people, definitions of language are not absolute, and meanings are connected to culture and background, the surrounding context. One of the objectives of this study is precisely to construct a more cohesive understanding of the phenomenon of ideal worker and working cultures in the workforce today.

The *ontological position* of this research is grounded by acknowledging that social phenomena are not necessarily physical constructions and are in fact dependant on the surrounding people (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For example, notions of ideal workers and working cultures described in this thesis are not physical constructions, but instead, are created in the end by human action and speech. The ideal worker and working culture only become real and salient through human activities. Thus, this study is conducted from a subjectivist ideological position.

My *epistemological position* reflects that information and knowledge are not always something quantifiable or based on causal relationships between variables (Guba &

Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, I believe that no one has access to the final knowledge of a phenomenon, the ultimate truth of "right", but only, we have access to subjective interpretations of reality. In the end, it all depends on what kind of meanings individuals give to their actions and phenomena around them.

Finally, this study is made from the *methodological position* finding that organisational and social structures are not always possible to open up and study through measurable attributes and preferences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). My methodological assumptions have guided me to strive to reach the inner world of this study subject and theme, in order to ultimately understand it better.

3.2 Qualitative study approach

This study is conducted following a qualitative research method. Even though, often argued as a "softer" research method, essentially qualitative research is different from quantitative research only in terms of how the data is formed and presented (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008). Therefore, the decision of the research method has been chosen based on the characteristics of qualitative research, and how these especially can help in finding meaningful results of the context surrounding this study and suitable for this particular research problem.

Compared to a quantitative study this research method is argued to be more fruitful when research strives to understand why things are in fact the way they are in social world (Tuli, 2010). Furthermore, in the local context, qualitative research method allows to increase understanding of the subjective social perceptions and realities constructed by individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

One of the key characteristics of this study is the absence of hypothesis. In qualitative research this means that the researcher does not have preconceived assumptions of the research subject or the results of the study (Eskola & Suoranta 2008). As the researcher I acknowledge the presumptions I have of the subject but hope to first and foremost learn throughout this research process. The goal of this research and its analysis is not to corroborate a predetermined hypothesis, as with quantitative studies, but instead, to interpret the empirical data by allowing the research its iterative and holistic nature (Guba

& Lincoln, 1994). This way, new perspectives and ideologies within this subject can be found.

The aim is to address the research questions proposed in the introduction by exploring the views and experiences of professionals in a targeted sample of information technology service and consulting companies in Finland. Therefore, a qualitative methodological approach supports that the participants' experiences and meanings can be attained as an insider's view of the group under study (Tuli, 2010). One of the fundamentals of this study method is the participation of the researcher herself. It is recognised that the researcher is not completely objective in this thesis, however, it is seen as a strength for this study. Nevertheless, objectivity is to be preserved when it comes to reporting of the research subjects' views, opinions and experiences. In this research I aim to recognise my own presumptions from those of the subjects'. Excluding this objectivity, the subjective nature of this qualitative study can bring forth results which might not be uncovered with a study conducted from another perspective. The general research tradition I will follow in my research design is a narrative, as this research design aims to reflect on the lived experience of the participants (Josselson, 2007).

3.3 Data and methods

I have conducted this study by gathering data from one industry, that is technology consulting industry. As women have for long been representing a minority in both technology and business, it seemed appropriate to deep dive into the intersection of the two gendered industries. The perceived image of both of these industries have been highly male-gendered: business people as men in suits, and technology people as men who code. Furthermore, consulting has long standing roots on sustaining demanding ways of working as consultants have typically been expected to be highly dedicated to their careers and organisations.

Interviewee selection and guidelines

Designing how the data should be selected and collected, I turned to interviews, further, semi-structured and theme interviews. First, I conducted two theme interviews with industry professionals working on the research problem, diversity and especially gender

diversity issues on a daily basis in Finnish technology industry. This decision was made to gain more understanding of the industry and the challenges and barriers the professionals can experience and that I might find when conducting the interviews of the target sample. Following the theme interview method (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008), I had predetermined theme areas to discuss during interviews, but no official questions were decided on and the order and scope of themes varied between the two interviews.

Moving on to the first target sample, I decided to use semi-structured interviews. This design ensures addressing of the research questions on a more broken down detailed level without restricting the conversational nature of the interview (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008). My goal was to allow the interviewees to express their feelings and describe their experiences in their own words and also further explore intriguing arguments and subjects that might arise during the interviews. In an explorative study without predetermined hypothesis it proved crucial to allow the discussions vary from interview to interview, as every respondent had unique experiences and views on the discussed topics.

In total, fourteen interviews were conducted between the 3rd of December 2019 and the 27th of March 2020. The respondents for the interviews were recruited from Finnish information technology consulting companies in Helsinki. The first core sample (n=9) for this study was gathered from companies with either over 50 million revenue or over 50 employees, to ensure that the results from the interviews would reflect the landscape of the researched technology consulting context on a more generalised level. This sample included nine interviews, all women, whose tenure varied to make sure to include respondents both as young professionals and as experienced workers with more mature ideas and viewpoints. Additionally, a second sample (n=5) was gathered to deepen understanding of especially the ideal worker image. For this purpose, five more interviews were conducted for a second sample to further target especially women who had been highly successful and had experiences of advancement and progression in their careers. In the end, the interviewees in this study came from eight different Finnish technology consulting companies.

This study's aim was to understand the narrative and holistic view that informants had developed over time, thus inclusion of high tenure participants was also crucial in understanding paths to success and on to the contrary, experiences of barriers and challenges as well. However, as the technology consulting industry in majority is focused

on recruiting and retaining young talent, also informants from the entry and lower levels of the organisation were seen as important to form a unified picture of the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, varying tenure and positions were also considered important to find how the industry and the notions of the idealised traits for the workers and the working cultures have changed over time. Each interview is described in Table 2.

Table 2 Description of interviews

Respondent	Organisational level	Industry experience	Age	Date
1	Mid-Senior	10-15 years	>35	3.12.2019
2	Associate	<5 years	<35	17.1.2020
3	Director	>15 years	>35	22.1.2020
4	Associate	<5 years	<35	31.1.2020
5	Director	10-15 years	>35	6.2.2020
6	Mid-Senior	5-10 years	>35	7.2.2020
7	Associate	<5 years	<35	11.2.2020
8	Mid-Senior	5-10 years	<35	12.2.2020
9	Mid-Senior	<5 years	>35	19.2.2020
10	Associate	<5 years	<35	21.2.2020
11	Mid-Senior	<5 years	>35	21.2.2020
12	Associate	5-10 years	>35	28.2.2020
13	Director	>15 years	>35	3.3.2020
14	Director	>15 years	>35	27.3.2020

Interview process

To make interviewees feel comfortable to share their experiences, even when negative, I applied several strategies to encourage the respondents. I introduced myself and the motivations behind this study to build rapport on the subject in the beginning of the interview. Furthermore, I often reflected on the experiences and thoughts of my interviewees seeking to help them opening more up. Many of my interviewees stated in the end that they had deeply enjoyed the conversation, and they were even surprised about the meaningfulness of some of the experiences that they had brought up in the discussion.

Interviews lasted from fifty-two to eighty-nine minutes, most taking around 60 minutes. The guidelines for questions around the main themes had been pre-planned, however, I deliberately strained from preparing highly detailed questions to be able to listen and

follow up with more relevant questions within the interview context. The themes to be covered with each respondent were the following: 1) general experiences as a woman in the workplace, 2) roles and traits desired in the workplace in general, 3) work and free time, 4) advancement and career progression, and 5) the future for women in the workplace. In total, the guideline included questions in 16 bullets, divided in five themes (Appendix B). Each theme was discussed as long as the interviewee had relevant and meaningful reflections to explain before carrying on to the next theme.

Two of the interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, when all others conducted face to face, at either the interviewee's workplace or at a coffee shop. Each interview was recorded and transcribed in verbatim. Further, each interviewee was offered anonymity and confidentiality, following the principles of ethics crucial in qualitative and narrative research (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008; Josselson, 2007). Most of the interviews were held in Finnish, except for two, which were held in English with women, who were working for Finnish companies but didn't speak native Finnish.

Designing how much of the data in the end should be collected was also an inductive process, characteristic for the qualitative research method, as data for a qualitative study is to be gathered until we can establish its saturation (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008). Therefore, interviewees were continuously sought after until the data showed that no new, radically different information would be likely to come forward. As the interviews had built a coherent story layer by layer, this story would not be enriched by repeating the same message further. After fourteen interviews, myself as the researcher concluded that enough data had been gathered to move on to the analysis phase.

3.4 Data analysis

The transcriptions of the interviews were written in April 2020. Collecting and arranging data already started the analysis process in my mind, however, a systematic schedule and plan begun only after the transcribing process had ended. The aim was to transcribe the interviews as soon as possible after they had taken place, and further, to start the analysis quickly after interview process had ended to ensure the discussions still remained freshly in my memory (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000).

The thematic data analysis started by looking for themes that had particularly interesting discussions about the researched topic, therefore, at first coding the transcripts into the most salient and prevailing themes. The preliminary codes were developed based on my research questions, going back and forth with data and theory as a natural inductive part of this analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The topics that were found fruitful for the research questions weren't necessarily the themes that took over most of the time in interviews or that the interviewees themselves were most interested in discussing about. For example, finding that in reality respondents did not mostly feel that there was inequality in the workplace or that the underrepresentation of women was a concern for them, was unexpected. However, digging deeper many respondents also noted that they were starting to connect experiences and notion to the imbalance that they hadn't seen before. Therefore, the theoretical framework supporting this study through the literature review was the main indicator of patterns and components to look for in the initial data analysis phase.

Firstly, I read each interview transcription thoroughly and marked down quotations that were most interesting from the study's perspective. I used an in vivo open-coding exercise by Gioia (et al. 2013) and coded for experiences, behaviours and characteristics that statements reflected about the ideal worker and working culture in their current and past workplaces. A complete table including all 145 first level codes can be found in Appendix B. Moving on, I arranged these first level codes into emerging topics through similarities and differences, comprising the second level of open coding method (Gioia at el. 2013). According to Gioia (et al. 2013) this second order analysis of giving specific categories or phrasal descriptors is extremely important to developing themes that can help describing and explaining the observed phenomenon. Thus, in this process it proved extremely vital to think simultaneously on multiple levels to build a unified picture of the arising themes. Once all interviews had been second-level coded, I was able to compare again the emerging themes to the counterparts presented in the theoretical background. Thus, the second level codes were organised according to the theoretical framework forming the third level of the open coding method by Gioia (et al. 2013). As a result, the overview of this three-level coding process and data structure is visualised in Figure 5.

Documentation of this work was kept in both Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel to ensure progression from raw data to a well formulated array of topics. Therefore, the analysis drew on one hand from a deductive method where inspiration for finding the

themes comes from the body of previous theory, and on the other hand, in an inductive manner by seeking for understanding in a newly researched context, as a woman in the Finnish technology consulting context. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

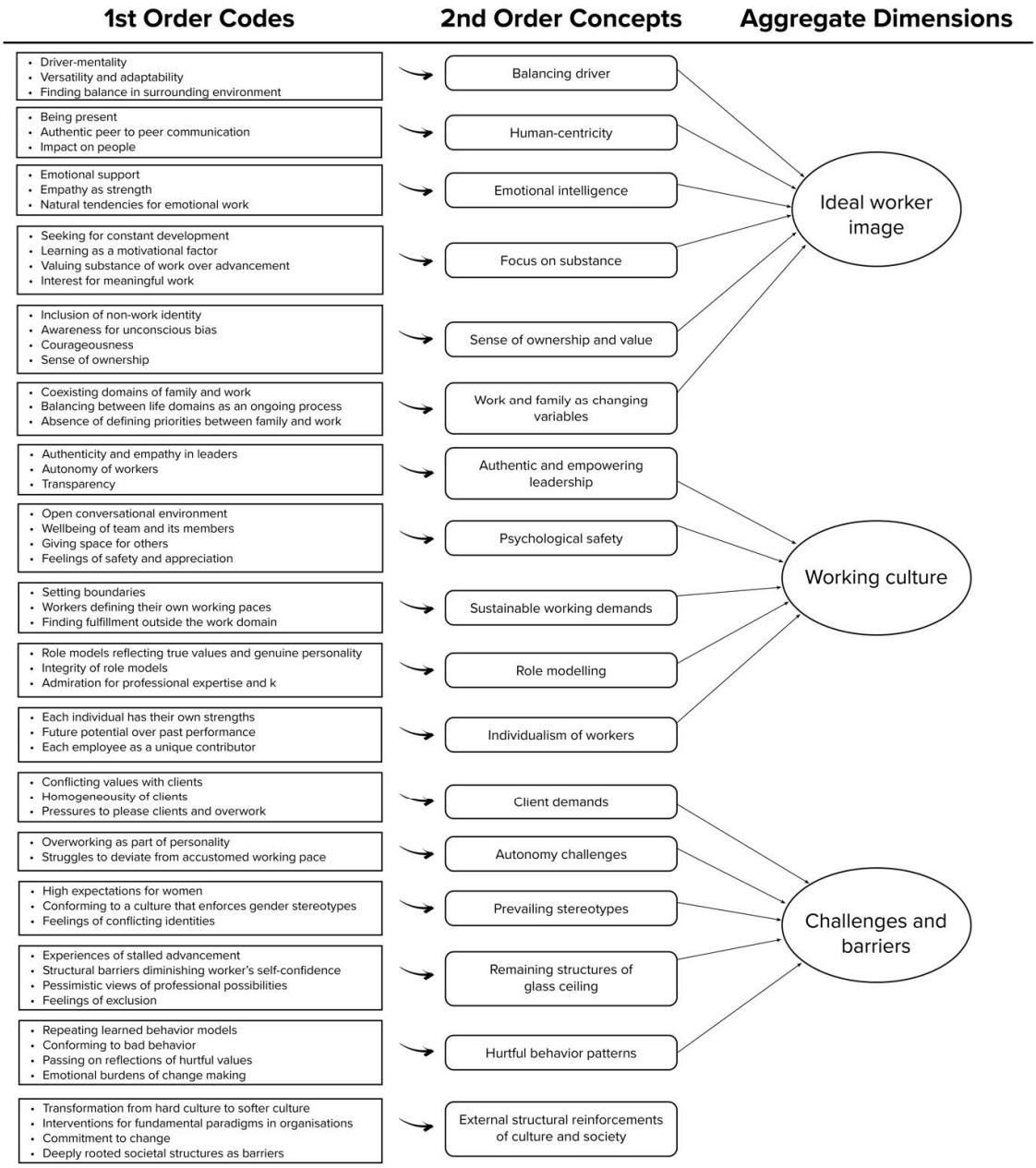

Figure 5 Data Structure (Reproduced from Gioia et al. 2013)

4 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of my analysis of the ideal worker image in the contemporary working culture as part of the issues underlying the lack of female representation in technology consulting. This chapter is organised as follows; to begin the analysis and generate a more holistic picture of the interviews, I will briefly discuss general implications formed through the interview process. Moving on, I will first I look at the traits and abilities for the ideal worker in the technology consulting sphere in Finland, described and narrated by the women in my study. I will go through six themes that rose from the interviews. Secondly, I will focus on how the modern work environment reflects the working culture in the technology industry covering five themes. And finally, I will analyse how the contemporary working culture and its ideal worker image support or hinder female representation and inclusion in the workforce. Essential for the final part of this analysis is to look into the pain points that my informants described as hindering their enactment of the ideal worker image.

The research questions that are guiding this chapter are:

- What are the qualities of an ideal worker image in contemporary technology consulting industry?
- What are the characteristics of the contemporary working culture in technology consulting?
- How do the contemporary ideal worker image and working culture support or hinder female inclusion in technology consulting?

To further ease the understanding of the following analysis, I will first describe the general implications from the theme interviews. It became clear in the course of the interviews that even though the same themes were covered during all interviews, the interviewees raised different issues and perspectives during these discussions. There was some variance on discourse based on what were the interviewees own interests of the different topics discussed and how their experience impacted both their professional and personal life.

When analysing the data, it was however, clear to make connections to the same themes across the variety of statements. Overall the uppermost perception of all the interviewees was that the landscape in terms of women at work and the desired ways of working have changed and are continuing to change. This creates both possibilities and challenges now and in the future for women and for all employees, despite of their gender. The notion of

an inclusive working culture rose as the key element characterising the discourse and conversation with these women.

In general, my interviewees felt that in Finland going to work in technology consulting is fairly easy. Most of the companies are now openly communicating about their desire to improve gender diversity, both internally and externally. Many of the interviewees described that they can see imbalance, but they do not necessarily feel it. By this they meant that even though in project work they might often be the only woman, they did not see it as a problem because gender was not made into an issue. They never felt as the minority, even though statistically they were outnumbered. They continue to acknowledge the imbalance but do not experience it.

Many of the interviewees brought forward the argument that women are lacking in the technology industry due to the fact that there simply aren't enough women interested in technology. Behind this was clearly the experience that already at a young age at school, boys were perceived to be suitable to study mathematics and science, while girls would be more prone to advance in languages or other social sciences. Consequently, there are not enough women coming out of the educational system to the technology field. Therefore, recruiting and contemplating on how to bring gender diversity is not fair and not equal to all genders.

The general image from the interviews on the state of diversity and representation of women rose as '*It's getting better but there is still much to do*'. Therefore, even though the amount of talk has increased, the problem remains. There is still the low number of women, the nature of tasks these women do, and what kind of opportunities are offered to women vs. men. The issue is not purely about gender. Interviewees describe the division as not between genders, but between worldviews. Previously they had experienced the 'old world' and foul attitudes. Now however, it's not only about differences in gender, but diversity in general, as worldviews and attitudes. Takes on life. Diversity can be many different things to individuals and drive them to minority.

The prevalent notion of interviews reflected that gender diversity can be seen as a moral case - where it is not acceptable to have gender imbalance – while at the same time diversity argues for a business case, bringing value to the organisation from untapped resources. It's changing, companies are taking much more responsibility over both drivers for diversity and it's brought up more, as we can see for example with the work and free

time balance. The employees' expectations about what kind of values are maintained in the company matter now much more.

4.1 Ideal worker image in technology consulting

In order to answer to my first research question "What are the qualities of an ideal worker image in contemporary technology consulting industry?", I will next present six themes described by my informants. These qualities present an image of an ideal worker that is respected, pursued and appraised for in the context of technology consulting today.

4.1.1 The driver -ability, versatility and adaptability

When talking about the traits and abilities that will take a good worker forward in an organisation in the researched context, one of the most repeated words was 'drive' or 'a driver'. The workers who are efficient, who are willing to throw themselves into the deep end, challenge themselves and in some ways adapt into the environment, do well in technology consulting. These drivers are individuals who are efficient and effective. Very concisely one of my interviewees described the abilities that were looked up to in her organisation as *hard*, *strict, spot on* and *fast*.

Similar perceptions were described by all interviewees. Being able to drive yourself forward and adapt into the ways of working that are seen as ideal is an ability that will take one forward. It means that the worker is taking control in their own hands. Not only for themselves, but also for other people in the organisation. These traits of hardness, strictness and abilities of speed and accuracy are traditionally described as masculine traits. Therefore, the environment seems to be supportive to the traits that have for many years been dominating in the male-gendered industry in technology and business.

However, being constantly on the go was raising concerns for the interviewees as well. One interviewee described that even though the driver ability is a success factor and a good trait for those who it comes naturally for, it might not be the single force that has no other consequences:

> "I think that many men - not all though - naturally have that sort of [driver] mentality. I think for me it has been easy to go forward because I can also be

> like that and it's not way out of my comfort zone. But I don't think it's always the best kind of communication model."

The interviewee further described that the ability to step outside of one's comfort zone is a good trait, but it shouldn't happen in the expense of relationship building. Traditionally these male-dominated businesses have portrayed a picture of shoving others aside when pursuing individual aspirations and goals. It can be seen as being selfish or not thinking about the consequences one's actions can have in others. However, there is consciousness also about how that sort of described drive, determination and pushing forward evolves around not only the working individuals, or the organisation itself even but how it effects on the business.

> "Technology has been really male-dominated. And it has been perceived as a steamroller that crushes everything, everything should go technology first. But now we have started to think - who is actually using the technology?"

Even though, there is the desire to act as a driving force, it's not an intrinsic value, without a notion of why. The driver ability has to be connected to a purpose. To succeed in one's work and being the ideal worker, one has to consider the environment and the surrounding people. What do they need?

One of my interviewees reflected strongly on their past career and how they saw their good traits and abilities as a success factor. This woman strongly felt that the value that they had brought to their organisation and the environment varied between different contexts. Being versatile, able to adapt and drive oneself and others with different focus was different in changing surroundings:

> "It could be that you have people who bring different things or then you bring people who can naturally bring both depending on the context. I feel like for me it was easy to switch between the two - I was adapting to the context at hand and bringing balancing elements from what I felt was missing. For example, I felt that working in a very traditional consulting company I was constantly praised for being very empathetic whereas in my current job they really appreciate my leadership in substance and expertise, the performance part of the business."

The interviewee described how being a driver does not mean that one should be crushing down everything and everyone in front of them. But to truly embody that ability to drive, one needs to look into the surrounding context. You shouldn't simply drive for the sake of it. To them versatility was one of the key things they saw as a success factor for their career progression and success. This interviewee further described how they can easily adapt to different situations unconsciously as well. They described it as a *trait natural to them,* which turned out to be what was actually needed in that situation:

> "I have been pretty flexible, and I know I can quite easily adapt to different situations and also in a way that I am not only adapting to 'everyone thinks like this'. It was never conscious. Later on, I only realised that it was actually in that situation and in that role what was needed."

The interviewee continued to describe that looking back, what had come naturally for her was actually one of the things that had helped most going forward. Being able to shift between communication styles and ways of working depending on what was needed in each context had helped her drive that organisation further, with a purpose.

Overall, the interviews painted a picture that efficiency combined with adaptability are good qualities for a worker in technology consulting. Furthermore, the statements from the interviews suggest that the traits connected to the ability to drive can be unconscious and depend on the context.

4.1.2 Human-centricity

Many minutes of my interviews spanned around, who technology is actually made for and what type of expertise does one need to be successfully working in the industry. Interviewees agreed that to be seen as the ideal worker in the context of technology consulting, one has to be able to be relevant when it comes to talking about the actual technology and the intellectual side for sure. However, it is not only talk about technology that one should master. Actually, on top of that, creating understanding, being present, making connections, and authentic peer to peer communication is crucial for these workers. One of my interviewees reflected on how they saw what is actually in the heart of understanding the world of technology:

> "I feel like hard values, that sort of intellectual side, analytics, intelligence and so forth, it's a hygiene thing - you just have to be on top of it. And you won't make it if you cannot discuss about things on the level that the other wants to. After that, what really makes good people truly great, is that they can connect with the other person."

The division between the two is still seen as quite strong, and there is open discussion around the topic. Talk about the human-centric side and its necessity had always been there but somehow, was often lost under the analytical side. The communicational aspect, traditionally seen as a very soft trait, then separates a great worker from a good worker. Authentic connections and open discussions with peers are something to be encouraged. Emotionality does not equal weakness. Showing vulnerability means that one is a human first, and as a worker, a genuine person.

Another interviewee talked about how important the humane side of the business is and how big of an effect human-centricity can have on the whole organisational activity. They shared an experience that especially had had a long-lasting impact on how they saw their organisations approach to human-centricity:

> "One thing happened with my female boss that was wonderful. We had this one situation at work and it completely went under my skin. I tried to be cool but I started to cry and tears came running down. And no one made a scene out of it, my boss touched my shoulder here and she said 'It's okay if you cry, it shows you care, it's alright'. That situation was really well played out. And I don't think too many men would have been able to do the same."

In this instance described by the interviewee, her superior had reached out, human to human. Instead, they could have been confused and helpless in that situation, not knowing how to react, maybe simply let it slide and act like it never happened. But this case showed not only to the individual employee but also to all the people witnessing, that in fact, showing your emotions is a good trait.

Essentially all my interviewees described or referred to similar situations and cases as described above. The human-centric side, especially, seemed to be one of the most praised traits in teamwork and leadership. Another interviewee explained how her working environment genuinely made her the best version of herself at work too. She talked about it with pride:

> "I am so proud of the crew that we have at work. You can be who you are. You can cry, when someone appraises you for a job well done and you can just be completely yourself."

Similarly, another interviewee shared an experience of how they felt like in the end it was all about genuine connections:

> "I had one of my colleagues leaving and they had made a thank you -card for me. It had a part that said, 'you are genuinely interested in what people are thinking and feeling'. I see that as a much bigger compliment than if someone would tell me I make things happen. Because this is how I leave my mark on people and make them feel good."

The interviews reflected that the driver-ability, and the analytical side of technology was not enough in long term, but what was really meaningful in the workplace was making real impact on the people around you. Being able to construct meanings from substance conversations and form relationships, which were in the end the core strength for my interviews, meant that one had to combine skills and draw insights from both the hardness and softness in their ways of working. As one of my interviewees so well said:

> "I think it's this sort of yin and yang that is sometimes difficult to separate from each other. There is something soft about everything that is hard, and something hard about everything that is soft. We need them both."

4.1.3 Emotional intelligence

Reflecting on their strengths and good feedback, a very evident trait, and prevailing sign of the human-centric approach in majority of the discussions, was the ability to be empathetic. The interviewees reflected on how these women had seen the emotional intelligence in both their own ways of working and in teamwork praised. Women described how they felt that it was extremely important to have both genders represented in teamwork, because the level that empathy was carried out "*has an effect on everyone's comfort and wellbeing"*. The general notion in these interviews was that empathy is a good trait and extremely important in creating a fruitful environment for working.

Many women stated that frequently several colleagues reached out to them wanting to talk when they were struggling. Emotional support was definitely evident even in the day to

day work for these women. Many of my interviewees described situations, where they had felt like the barriers of talking about feelings and the emotional side of the business felt natural to them. They described a sort of ease and fluency in carrying out empathy and emotional intelligence. Many women also referred to variance between genders in showing empathy and also the need for it. One interviewee described her experiences on how she had felt like she was more easily approached by their male clients compared to her male colleagues, because of tendency for empathy:

> "I feel that with my male clients I got to have conversations that they did not have with my male colleagues. For example, they wanted to spar about career development, how people are doing, what people are thinking and feeling in their projects or about wellbeing in the workplace. More about topics related to affect."

Another interviewee described how they had noticed variance in the nature of discussions between women and men, and how they felt that being a female had had a positive correlation in these discussions:

> "In leadership and management roles I have felt that being a woman is my strength because 100% success depends on you getting along with other people; do you have conversational skills, are you able to really talk about feelings and understand feelings, practice empathy and understand why some things drive others, why someone is behaving in certain way, why someone never wants to tell in what point of their work they are in, and how I might help them to tell me that. As a woman it is much easier to ask - not for everyone probably - but feelings are much more easily associated with being a woman like asking 'how are you', or 'do you have anxiety over these deadlines'. I feel like they are my strongest tools."

Many of my interviewees felt that the emotional work related to their daily interaction with their co-workers and clients was key in building business through relationships. This emotional work most visibly included the ability for empathy and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, some women feel like these traits have been previously lacking or otherwise undermined in leadership positions retained by men.

> "When I took over my current role it became very clear that my team's previous male leaders had never asked the team how they were or what they would like to do. Are they interested in their work or anything like that. The whole team had the impression that they are not heard, nor had they actually been heard in a long time."

This suggests that emotional intelligence is a new and emerging trait, previously not associated with the traditional and masculine ideal worker image. Furthermore, it seems that women especially are portraying abilities and possibly strength in possession of emotional intelligence and emotional work.

4.1.4 Passion

According to the interviews, workers are not strongly motivated by money, fame and glory. Instead, they emphasised meaningfulness and substance of their work over status. Their passion towards work stemmed from "your *projects"* and "*from the people you work with"*.

Reflecting on how their aspirational level and motivation was built, interviewees had many statements showing that at least in this working context, career is not pursued simply for the sake of working. The following phrases are descriptive of these aspirations for seeking for internal and very personal motivational aspects for work:

> "I've always been very passionate about my own work. I cannot do my work if I am not motivated. I cannot be in a situation where I am working simply because I have to work."

> "I am so much more interested in doing something that I am excited about, doing something I love and something that brings me that sort of motivation than money, facetime long hours and bonuses."

This indicates that the worker is motivated by the substance of their work. The worker is seeking for a deeper meaning in their work from the substance and environment of the workplace. There is a need for finding fulfilment and self-development, on a very conscious level. One more interviewee described their aspirations for career advancement as follows:

> "I'm not really into advancing. I think I am much more into the work that I am doing. I am interested in the projects I am doing and learning from them. The substance."

The passion towards the substance of work, therefore, goes beyond ambitions of advancement. Climbing up the organisational ladder is not worth pursuing if one's daily work tasks and projects are not giving enough input for finding motivation. This suggests, that career progression is not actively in the minds of my interviewees, but rather, workers are interested in learning. As described by one of my interviewees:

> "I have never really thought about advancing as such. I've never really planned my career. It's so much more interesting to do more meaningful things and learn a lot than somehow systematically advance."

Doing meaningful work and work tasks through fulfilling substance is not the only aspect that is considered to pass as priority over advancement. It is also about the ways of working. Not only the substance of the work is important, or the tasks specifically allocated to that work, but the take on those tasks and how workers are expected to carry them out. One of my interviewees told about the times she had been offered a new position in their previous working place. Even though, she thought that career progression would be beneficial for her future opportunities, she did not end up taking the offer, because she "*didn't like the way that I would be expected to do my work".* The take on the new role would have been conflicting with the ways of working and values she fostered in her own work.

The importance of the meaningful substance of work and the ways of working suggest that career progression and clear advancement path is not as meaningful to the contemporary worker as it used to be. Competitiveness and aggressiveness in this area is absent, even though, workers have ambition and sense of ownership. Furthermore, for the substance of work there is no end game, a box that once ticked would have fulfilled the worker's desire to learn and develop oneself. One respondent reflected on her future aspirations as follows:

> "I'm kind of thinking what's more to achieve now? I have gotten to do great things and deal with good accounts. That I wish will not stop. I wish that I will get even more interesting projects, where I could learn new things. Those kind of things I wish will never stop."

Seeking for meanings and finding passion from the substance of work is a lifelong process, a gift that at its best can keep on giving. This demonstrates, in my opinion, that the worker looks for variety instead of stability and involvement over competition.

4.1.5 Self-reflection and ownership

Themes in desires, aspirations and self-development were some of the most fruitful areas of my interviews. The discussions spanned from visions for professional growth to more personal level aspirations, and it became clear that these themes are very meaningful to workers. As the worker is not simply doing work for the sake of working, and they are constantly seeking for learning and development, this translates also back to how they see their true selves in the context of work. In the interviews we talked about role theories and how these workers execute their personalities at work. One interviewee talked about their experiences of their true self showing in the environment at the workplace as follows:

> "Who are you and what do you want? It's not that you are a different person at work and outside work. It's you. And it's important that you do not let your working environment and its pressures effect who you are. Of course, there comes times when you question yourself and think if this is too complicated for you."

This was a notion shared in general by most of my interviewees. The separation of a work-self from one's true identity was something many of these women had clearly spent time on thinking about. Essentially, many of them did not see their work-self separated from their true selves. However, not having a separate work identity does not mean that work performance is directly in correlation with one's personal life. One of my interviewees described how they had come a long journey in understanding this:

> "Most difficult for me has been understanding that my work is not me. I can fail at my job without failing as a person. I am my own regulator."

Professional shortcomings, therefore, do not speak for one's success in personal life. Even though, the worker would have one identity between these two domains, performance is not directly translatable between the two. What matters is how one seeks for self-development. One interviewee described how they had themselves realised how much self-

development and learning with a steady pace was helping them to overcome the feelings of failure:

> "I am kind of in a transformational phase because previously I had forgotten that I am so much more well when I am learning new things and giving myself the time to learn. Instead of just pushing constantly forward."

The modern worker has their true identity at work but seeks for self-development and learning. It clearly seems that these workers are highly skilled at self-reflection and on a high level of self-awareness. The eagerness and search for learning is reflected also in how these women saw their own role as the executor of these learning processes. How can I do better? How can I help myself feel better? How can I treat the people around me better? This reflection is especially needed when action is caused by unconscious biases, as described by one interviewee:

> "I have been thinking a lot about these hidden and unconscious biases so whenever I notice that somebody doesn't really get a say in a meeting I try to make space for them because I am a loud woman, I can take space, but I can also help somebody else get their space. And the more we talk about these things the more other people get conscious about this."

The contemporary worker, therefore, also understands how unconscious biases can cause problems in the workplace. Even though, the worker is on high levels of knowing themselves and has the courage to demand things at the workplace for themselves, they are also highly aware of the fact that they cannot control all of their emotions and individual factors that can change the dynamic and perceptions in their work. Similar opinions about how we should consciously aim to deal with unconscious biases were raised also by other interviewees, such as follows:

> "I think a major thing we should understand is that we all have an unconscious bias. That should be a part of mandatory training, and the higher you go, the more it should be highlighted and the more you should be questioned for it."

The unconscious bias, therefore, is accepted and it is not in its essence a bad thing. The worker only needs to acknowledge the fact that unconscious biases exist, so they can even better think about how to communicate in the workplace and make decisions for everyone's wellbeing.

Furthermore, many of my interviewees embodied the true identity and the self-reflective nature of the modern worker in how they clearly experience their power in saying how they want to work. According to these women's experiences, they have say in what kind of an environment and atmosphere they prefer to work in. Moreover, they are also constantly reassessing their own ways of working. Hierarchies are changing into the acceptance of courage to challenge. It's not anymore that the worker will just blindly accept whatever is given. One of my interviewees described as follows:

> "I don't have that kind of authority, which I think is kind of my strength as well as my weakness. In a way even if someone is in a much higher position than myself, I don't feel that they have the right to ask me to do things that are not written in my contract."

Worker has the ability to demand and claim what they believe they deserve. There is courageousness. Many of my interviewees described their experiences of not being afraid to raise their voices and avoiding being pushed to an unfitting role. One interviewee explained it as follows:

> "I take things forth quite boldly. I won't twist myself into some role. You do that from time to time and then you realize it's not sustainable for the long term."

Similar statements were made by other women as well. The common theme for many was that tip toeing around is useless. It is needless to pretend you are something that you actually are not, but also, that things are not as they seem. When there are issues, it is better to speak up about them instead of avoiding confrontation. One of my interviewees told about their experiences in being vocal about difficult things and feelings of confusion:

> "I have a pretty straight up style and I am not afraid to raise certain issues that are difficult, because I feel like they need to be talked about and we have to talk about things that you have been disappointed in; being disappointed in your own result or say out loud if you don't understand what you are doing. That has really been one of my biggest learning lessons throughout these years, understanding that I am not dumb, but these guys really just didn't know what they were doing."

Raising one's voice when in doubt is not a sign of inadequate intelligence, but in fact, a solid strategy to overcome difficult situations. Being able to "*navigate through conflict situations"* as well is key for success.

Overall, courageousness is descriptive to these self-reflective workers who challenge their unconscious biases and raise their voices to concerns even when the situation is difficult, and the result is uncertain. These notions of how one should carry out their personalities at work and not submit to a pre-casted role, but instead stay true to their own identities, reflect how these workers see their own value. What am I worth? What is my contribution for this organisation? These women refer to "*playing with their own strengths and values"* and if they would feel like this would contradict with what is expected of them, they would *"probably go somewhere else"*.

This suggests, in my opinion, that individuality and the acknowledgement of workers value is shaping, and these working individuals are also taking a more active role in how they take ownership of their own identities, work and careers.

4.1.6 High work-life balance

One of the most debated themes surrounding the ideal worker is the divide between the work and the family context. However, the general implication that the interviewees described was that work-life balance is great, especially, when they had compared technology consulting to other industries, they had previously worked in. Generally, the interviews gave the impression that there are no more two spheres, work and family or free time, that would have to compete with each other. It seems, that priorities between the two do not have to be set but instead, work and family domains can coexist. Talking about setting priorities one of my interviewees explained her rationale behind this traditional dilemma:

> "It's not about defining your first and second priority. They are kind of two different things and in the best-case scenario they boost each other. From time to time they are in conflict, that you cannot help. Then you just have to try to make the best out of both."

Similar statements were made by many. The discussions proved that work and family contexts even though, from time to time in conflict, are not by definition in a rivalry

relationship in the eyes of these women. Nevertheless, the search for balance between the two is an ongoing learning process for many. There is no need for clear definitions. Interviewees describe it being much more about *"the balance"* than about the segregation of the two, although, appointing to the importance of having enough of *"that switch off time"* meaning enough of time when one is not working.

According to my perception, this notion about work and family seems to be also a generational phenomenon. More mature women who had been in leading positions or working for a smaller start-up described that one has to simply go with the flow and just learn how to blend the two together. However, the younger generation strongly seems to be experiencing the demand in change of what one is expected of in terms of work and free time. One of my interviewees described her thoughts about work as a priority domain:

> "We talk about what we value in life and I feel it would be so horrible that you would just work until your 40-50 years old and then you would freak out about what you actually want to do with your life. Your job doesn't warm you in the end."

Overall, the interviews suggest that workers do not have to define priorities between work and family, if they do not want to. Instead, it's acceptable for the worker to state what they themselves are comfortable with, what they are capable of. According to my data in general, the dilemma between the domains appears to shape in a way that one does not have to prioritise work nor free time. Work and family, therefore, can be in the worker's life in a coexisting relationship. Individuals do not have to place those priorities between the two and that is not questionable. Furthermore, not setting the number one priority does not mean that if the worker does value their free time, that would automatically mean they do not value work or that they would be less of a good worker. As one of my interviewees stated: "*On the contrary, they [companies] compete with having that work-life -balance*". A good worker is someone who matches with this statement, looking for and also carrying out the balance between work and family domains. As one of my interviewees described:

> "I think we at our company we also hire grown-ups, we want to have people who have something outside of their job: family, hobbies and so forth. Because if your job is the only thing you do then you kind of get… your job can't be your everything, that's not healthy."

The interview results therefore, suggest that work and family are not constants as domains, but actually changing variables, contributing to the values of adaptability, unpredictability and autonomy.

Table 3 A summary of findings describing the ideal worker

	Characteristics of the ideal worker
Narrative by respondents	The driver-ability, versatility and adaptability
	Human-centricity
	Emotional intelligence
	Passion
	Self-reflection and ownership
	High work-life balance

4.2 Working culture in technology consulting

The second section of this chapter four is focused on forming the narrative of the current working culture described by the fourteen interviews conducted for this study. The following five themes were descriptive of the working culture that is desired, highlighted and embraced in the context of technology consulting today.

4.2.1 Authentic and empowering leadership

One of the most interesting themes in my interviews included statements and opinions about leadership. As it is arguably one of the most defining properties of working cultures, it is also a theme that often raises strong sentiments from the perspective of the worker. Discussing with the interviewees about how leadership is practiced in their organisations, authenticity was one of the themes that was portrayed by many.

> "I appreciate when they are themselves. And it can be the hardest thing to ask, if your working culture does not support that."

The contemporary working culture is receptive to leaders who also, as the workers, execute their true selves in the context of work. The masculine leadership style of demonstrating

power-distance is outdated and averted. The reason for this is that first of all, it has a negative effect on the relationship between the worker and the leader. The masculine leadership approach is easily experienced as *"a bully who micromanagers".* This traditional leadership style is not even considered as leadership and workers *"lose their respect"* on those kinds of leaders essentially quite fast. Micromanaging, especially, was referred to by many, indeed as it erodes respect and the relationship between the worker and the leader. Leadership approach which shows signs of micromanaging also diminishes the creative side of the workers.

> "Let your people figure things out themselves. Micromanaging kills all creativity. That's important."

The discussions suggest that leadership is a very emotional and sensitive position, where instead of following predetermined rules and best practices, even better approach is to listen and to adapt:

> "You have to be really sensitive about when certain firmness is needed. Sometimes you need to dig deeper and let people find their own path."

Similar statements referring to autonomy and self-management in teams were bringing diversity into the discussion. A good leader embraces diversity and supports the team in finding their solution, as described by one interviewee:

> "I have chosen to believe that diversity brings value. As in my way is not the only way to solve things, but I have to give my team space to solve it in their own way."

This suggests that leaders are not all-knowing individuals, who merely command subordinates to execute their wishes. Leaders, managers and people in upper positions do not see themselves as superiors. The leadership does not come from an ivory tower where leaders present themselves as the perfect individuals, the one who has all the answers and never makes mistakes. Instead, sharing experiences of failure is encouraged and improves not only human affiliation but learning and self-development in the working culture. Talking about mistakes, one of my interviewees shared their experience after starting as a team leader in a new organisation. They saw that bringing failure into the discussion was a crucial turning point in creating an environment that furthers self-development:

> "For the first three months you mostly just tell them [team members] about your own mistakes. Like 'I failed in that, and I did that poorly'. So that after those three months someone will say 'I made a mistake too'. After that they will only start sharing their mistakes, because that is one of the most important things - finding points of development in your own actions."

Leaders do not expect their team members to be perfect, because "*we are all human"*. Therefore, making mistakes and accepting that failure is a necessary turning point for professional and also personal growth, is encouraged. This is an environment generally created by the practice and example of leadership.

Good leadership is especially tested in '*being there for your team'*. One of my interviewees talked about how they saw they should be spending their time in practicing good leadership:

> "I think I would be a much better superior if I would just lead and have more time to hang around at the office. Because then people can actually approach you."

Not watching behind the workers' backs, not breathing down their neck but giving the space and time for the workers to approach and being available for them. Leaders want to be in reach for the employees when they need support. They do not ever need to be left on their own to "*wonder where we should go".*

The discussions in this theme suggest that good leaders should be there for their organisation, to support and to listen. Practicing good leadership, therefore, means investing in emotional work. Essentially, a role in a managerial or leadership position is a service profession, one that is fostered in a culture of autonomy and growth but also trust and support.

4.2.2 Psychological safety

Discussions about working culture in my interviews in many instances lead to discussions about inclusion and diversity. Often interviewees described how the talk about inclusion and the working values embraced in the company were reflected on upper levels of the organisation. "*I feel that our current CEO has really brought these values forward*". Many

statements by my interviewees reflected on the characteristics of the working environment that generates a desired working culture, such as the following:

> "We need to create an environment where people feel good, grow and develop, where they are excited, and motivated."

Environments that are psychologically safe for the workers to express themselves, their feelings and concerns are creating positive qualities for the working culture. It seems that being vocal about psychological safety and making sure that this is understood across the organisation by having "*spoke persons*" in the upper levels, is enabling lower levels to share this notion in the working culture. However, psychological safety is not only about the talk. Especially in leadership. For example, one of my interviewees had following concerns about leadership talk in terms of culture:

> "It's easy for upper level management to talk about these topics because it is such a blurry cloud. But when you have to actually tell your managers 'what behaviours', what does it mean?"

The statements from my interviews suggest that priorities for organisational culture are in a turning point. There is a shift where psychological safety needs to translate to concrete action. In other words, how exactly and what behaviours will create psychological safety for people to allow their own creativity to harness, and the courage to throw oneself out there and strive for innovation. To make a team actually work, all members have to be observant of even the smallest signals that someone in the team might be unhappy, if there is dissatisfaction, cynicism, or insecurity of any kind and why. These conditions are tested in moments where people express their feelings and share why they are hurt. This task is often assigned to women. However, promoting psychological safety and emotional teamwork is problematic when gendered. As one of my interviewees talked about their experiences:

> "Open, safe and healthy conversational culture and a culture for good leadership needs efforts from both men and women. Sometimes I feel that aggressiveness is highlighted in men as I find that my male colleagues on my level are usually much more often acting aggressive. Where instantly I feel like I am not safe. Are you trying to point out my mistakes? It's not very constructive."

Psychological safety had an effect also beyond internal work in the organisation. The employees in the contemporary work culture describe that the feelings of safety are increasingly important not only in leadership and among peers in creating more effective teamwork, but furthermore, creating better products and services. To make this happen psychological safety needs to be one of the top priorities and a goal that is actively revised. One of my interviewees described how they approached the communication and interaction in teamwork:

> "Usually in our teams I have found consensus for wishing that there would be some person to take responsibility of the wellbeing of the team and its members. For me it has always come quite naturally."

Even though, the world of technology consulting is highly competitive, success cannot be harnessed in the expense of others. A safe environment reflects that "*all the people around you want you to succeed*", even when there is pursuit for excellence. Individual success is not relevant when looking at the big picture. One interviewee reflected on the experiences of what is essential in teamwork:

> "I value and put a lot of value into being a person who is inclusive. And who pays attention to the whole team and the good of the team. You have to be a good team worker because, especially, the type of projects we work in with agile development, the team is only as good as the members that pull together."

Psychologically safe cultures are gravitating more positive vibes and creating a better working environment for all genders. It is not only for the sake of women as "*an inclusive culture for women makes also men thrive*". One of my interviewees shared their experiences on inclusive working cultures as follows:

> "If the culture is more tolerant and people are genuinely more motivated, everyone, also women, will have more courage to come work there and all kinds of people too, not just men. And maybe then we can also create better products and services."

This suggests, that psychological safety is not only beneficial for the inputs of the company but also the outputs. Contemporary working cultures are embracive for not only the internal wellbeing of their workers and making sure that they feel safe and appreciated in their working place, but moreover, having an effect on the work itself, the ideas and the

kind of solutions that these workers can generate. Traits of the current working culture in this research context, therefore, propose values reflecting collaboration, trust and support.

4.2.3 Sustainable working demands

Another theme rising from the interviews was the debated conflict that working can oppose between the work and family domains. The statements and opinions of my interviewees suggest that the working culture in technology consulting field is encouraging towards having a family, where finding fulfilment to your life also in other areas outside work, is encouraged and appraised for. This can be seen from the statements that are concerning the working pace and the organisational conventions for working hours and times. Many interviewees shared their experiences from the past where traditionally consulting had demanded working evenings and weekends, and how it has changed now. One of my interviewees reflected this in their following statement:

> "Here I haven't had issues of having to long working days. Nor has there been any pressure of people to work evenings, nights, or weekends. I don't think it's favoured. Sometimes you have to be flexible of course. But if you want to work from eight to four, the gloves can be off after that."

Similar opinions about working hours were also highlighted in other experiences. One of my interviewees pointed out that, especially in the technology consulting industry, one of the reasons to improve and highlight working pace as sustainable, is to hold on to the scarce skilled workforce:

> "If we think about these more progressive companies in technology consulting, of course the culture varies, but I do not feel that it is the type where you have to work day and night. It has changed, maybe also because the skilled worker shortage is causing people to vote on their feet. They will say that they also have another life."

Promoting sustainable working hours is therefore, a competitive advantage. Again, we see that there is autonomy for the worker, as it is up to them to set their working hours and ways of working. As further described by my interviewees, for example:

> "We have a really good culture in that even though, people do work long days, people do not expect you to be available on Saturdays."

It is therefore, up to the worker to define what actually are 'long days' and the culture is acceptable for flexibility in working hours, if one would leave at three o'clock, according to my interviewees, no one would question you for it. This suggests that the worker has power over their own working hours, as they can be flexible in carrying out sustainable working paces, promoted by the organizations in technology consulting. This theme suggests values on the working culture for autonomy and stimulation.

4.2.4 Role models reflecting emotional work and professional knowledge

To the modern working cultures and organisations, role modelling is crucial for professional career and self-development. For women especially, it seems that having another woman to look up to empowers them and boosts self-confidence in striving for career progression. The women who were missing role models, were describing how that had an effect on seeing their own professional growth and clear progression path. One interviewee described the importance of role models in their organisation as follows:

> "It's harder for me to see the path, because they [role models] aren't visible anywhere. Am I missing something, should I study more of this or that, should I do more of some sort of cases, do I need to do some networking? What is it?"

It seems that if a worker is wondering how their career path could look like, it is harder for them to imagine how they might move forward due to the underrepresentation of role models. There simply is no one who is showing example on how to. The path doesn't necessarily have to be cleared by another woman specifically, but also a male role model can be encouraging for women, too. Additionally, it is not only about looking up, but also looking next to oneself. Another interviewee reflected on the influence role models had had on their career and self-development:

> "I've had superiors or other mentor-like female but also male figures, who I have been able to talk with about my experiences. And not only role models looking up but also on the same level. Peer to peer support."

Furthermore, interviewees described how role models in senior positions had given workers "*more encouragement", "positive feedback", "advice" and "thoughts",* whereas on the same level they have been able to *"share experiences"* and *"spar".* These functions suggest that role modelling is not specifically tied to gender. Women can have male role

models as well. Role modelling is in a sense a lot like what my research has found with leadership: it's about authenticity. One interviewee explained the characteristics they value and respect in their role models:

> "There is no one kind of role model. I think the biggest word to remember is that you have to be genuine. If you have very strongly segregated your work me and me me, it's not genuine anymore and it will not work for you long term."

Similarly, other statements rooting for authenticity described:

> "Being yourself. You can have roles, we each have them in different contexts, you shouldn't be afraid of them. We are each a little different, but you need to know who you are. You shouldn't go too much into what you think others are expecting from you to be. Honesty to yourself and others, how important it is to communicate about your own ways and how you can communicate in a way that others will respect."

Statements from my interviewees suggest, therefore, that there is no one kind of perfect role model but moreover, reflecting true values and genuine personality is favoured. Trying to fit a role does not attract respect or admiration. For these workers, role models are individuals, and therefore, portraying a specific predetermined character is not considered ideal. The interviewees see the problem of inauthentic roles and masks especially in women, who are playing a role they think is desired in the workplace and context of work. One interviewee describes their experiences about authentic role models as follows:

> "If you see a woman who has shaped herself into as much of a 'business as usual' type and has advanced in that way, I don't think it is a good role model. But whether it is a man or a woman, if you see them uplifting new kinds of skills and new kinds of values and topics into the discussion and still go forward? That's the kind of role model I find important."

Furthermore, similar experiences were described of role models who are specifically lifted and highlighted in organisations. Again, if the lifted role model is seen as pointed out only for the sake of having role models visible in the organisation without these role models depicting genuine traits to look up to, the efforts of role modelling can fall short:

> "If someone has clearly modified themselves into fitting into a specific mould, and then they are lifted up, it does not really warm my heart."

This suggests that role modelling is tied to feelings, as role models should be "*heart-warming".* Overall, it seems that real and authentic role models should portray values on two different domains as the interviewees described role models from two perspectives. The first is by the character of the role model: which personality traits and values these people bring forward and represent. One interviewee explained these characteristics as follows:

> "They [role models] are appropriate, fair, and in a way that they are not too tough or strict but they are also empathetic, you can see that they consider things from a variety of perspectives."

And further:

> "I think role models should be the type of people who believe in what they are doing, and do what they believe in."

Role models who represent these desired characteristics and values, therefore, have high integrity. One interviewee reflected on a specific role model they looked up to in their organisation as follows:

> "I have this one female role model that entails the kind of traits I admire. I appreciate so much this kind of strength. And what I mean by it, is that you stand behind your words, you have high integrity, but you also have the ability for empathy. This person is exactly like that. I find her so inspiring because she takes ownership of her work, she is very candid but also has that sort of warmth to her. You feel like you are safe, and this person also wants my best as well."

These role models have high moral and ethics but also represent values of emotional intelligence and empathy. This suggests, that role models in the first categorisation of portraying personality traits and values are doing emotional work.

The second perspective for role modelling that raised from discussions was the expertise and substance these role models represented. Workers who looked up to people in their organisation in this category admired professional knowledge and skills with respect to the

work substance. One interviewee explained that she admired people who are "*funny but still focused on the substance"*. Further, role models shouldn't be too "*self-important",* because interviewees claim this as *"really uninspiring"*. Overall statements showed that if a role model too clearly assigns them to a role, they *"lose their personality."* Showing a good example, leading and being a role model is *"that sort of visionary, easy-going and fun, and then substance-focused."*

One of my interviewees reflected on how they experienced a strong role model in their organisation:

> "I had one really strong role model in particular because of their skills. I wanted to inhale all of their expertise and we had long calls and conversations about all the things I couldn't yet understand, and they had such a strong experience and expertise. Instead of thinking that someone would be in a certain position, the thought that they had the sort of expertise I wanted for myself as well meant much more to me."

This would suggest that workers are looking for these role models also for professional growth and learning. Role models are seen as an opportunity to reflect on the skills that could be acquired and knowledge that they could reach as well.

Therefore, the results of my interviews suggest that role modelling on one hand is about portraying values and personality traits that are seen as ideal for emotional intelligence and personal growth and on the other hand, the skills and expertise the worker could acquire for themselves to grow professionally. Role models in that sense are about seeing learning opportunities and growing not only as an ideal working individual but also as a better person.

4.2.5 The worker is an individual first

The working culture portrayed here does not look into their workers as a blurry bunch of machines. Instead, it became clear at the course of the interviews that in these work cultures, each individual has their own platform and their own strengths and qualities that will work for them in the organisational environment. This sort of environment reflects on the individualistic side and values desired. One of my interviewees had already had a long history with management and explained the potential of the worker as follows:

> "We shouldn't look at your past performance but your future potential. Are you relevant for the future workforce, how does that future workforce look like, do you have those skills, do you have the potential to develop to what we need in the future? We reward you not on your past performance but on your future potential."

This suggests that each employee is seen as a unique contributor to not only the work and the tasks required by it but further, the working environment and the organisational culture that is favoured in the company. What kind of values does the company want to reflect in how they see their employees? My research and the results suggest that the working cultures indeed want to spread the message that the worker is always first and foremost, an individual. This individual is one with unique history and skills and abilities that mixed with the given context will further pose a unique combination when brought into the organisation. The notions from my interviews propose that individualism and the appraisal for each workers' own strengths, developed through the process of high self-reflection translates into workers genuinely finding a place to work where they feel like they belong. And if they do not belong, they will find their place more suitable somewhere else. As one of my interviewees explained their situation when it comes to understanding individual traits and adapting to the surrounding environment:

> "I feel like people need to play with their own strengths and values. If I would feel like it would contradict with what I am expected of, I would probably go somewhere else."

The contemporary working cultures and organisations, therefore, are comprised of individuals first, creating a community that is respective to personalised needs, strengths and also weaknesses. This kind of culture fosters values of autonomy, variety and growth.

Table 4 A summary of findings describing the working culture

Characteristics of the working culture	
Narrative by respondents	Authentic and empowering leadership
	Psychological safety
	Sustainable working demands
	Role models reflecting emotional work and professional knowledge
	Individualism of workers

4.3 Reinforcing conventions of the past and hindrances of the new ideal

To answer my final research question: "how do the contemporary ideal worker image and working culture support or hinder female inclusion in technology consulting?" this chapter dives deeper into the pain points and boundaries of inclusiveness experienced by my respondents. This chapter depicts the barriers still to be crossed described by the fourteen interviews conducted for this study. The following six themes each represent an area of discussion that are still reinforcing conventions of the past and hindering the transformation to the new ideal in the context of technology consulting today.

4.3.1 The demands of the client-facing roles

Even if the contemporary working culture would support a more emotionally intelligent, softer and human-centric approach to both character and ways of working, in consulting the work is naturally a majority of the time dealing with clients. From this extra layer, interviewees described some difficulties in expressing their true identities and ways of working they would prefer. One of my interviewees explained how they saw soft and hard values conflicting in their work:

> "I haven't really experienced conflicts in my work between soft and hard values. More maybe if I think about business and my work. I mean, clients' businesses, from there sometimes stems really hard values that you just have to think about the money and nothing more."

Many of these women described that the only way to be believable in these client facing roles, is to "*express very clearly from the start that I am the expert and specialist*". They

have to put in extra effort in making sure that they are presenting themselves in a way that the client accepts. Some women reflected that frequently these hard values were connected to genders and how these genders still represent the "*old world*". A valid point one of my interviewees raised in discussion was that when working in consulting in Finland, these consulting companies essentially are catering Finnish corporate giants. "*And I can tell you, pulp and paper, manufacturing… There are no women there.*" Therefore, working in a client-facing role in this context means that women often are statistically underrepresented in the client companies as well.

It seems that, especially, in the client-facing role being a woman can become a barrier, a burden. It's an additional mountain to climb. This barrier appears in part to be dictated by the nature of the technology industry and the substance of the work in these client-facing roles. Many of these women, even if they felt 100% comfortable in their own organisation, described how the client-facing role can still raise issues and caution:

> "You notice coming from clients that it's kind of an automatic assumption that if we are talking about analytics or coding then it must be a guy. And then they are really surprised if it turns out to be a woman. Or if it is about visual design then they are surprised it's a man. Those kind of basic presumptions about someone's skills, which easily leads to feeling that if I am a woman doing analytics then people wonder if I can actually do it or not."

These kinds of experiences can in the end hurt the workers self-esteem and how they see their own value. Another very controversial discussion related to gender with many of my interviewees evolved around maternity leave and the arrangements regarding this leave. One interviewee shared their experience about how clients especially can view situations regarding pregnancy and maternity leave:

> "We have people who have just gone or about to go on maternity leave, and our organisation is so wonderful in saying it's great and arranging everything but I can tell from clients that they clearly feel like they might not want that person and wonder like 'well, they probably won't even work for the last month' and these sort of things. Which can be true but also someone can fall ill for any other reason as well. Those kinds of things are so strongly related to gender and will always be. You cannot change that completely."

Moreover, than issues related to gender, the challenges in the consultancy businesses are also about how these clients expect consultants to execute their work and how the consultants should be using their time. Even if the workers themselves have great skills in regulating their own working hours and the organisation is supportive to a healthy work-life balance, the client might have a different set of standards. They might often expect the consultants to be available all the time. One of my interviewees described these pressures coming from the clients:

> "I feel like it [pressure for overtime working, long hours] is coming from the clients. We are not the cheapest operator in the world so in that sense we need to kind of do what has been promised. And if something unexpected comes up and it needs to be solved by tomorrow."

Interviewees felt like they have no other choice but to be flexible because they are in a sense doing customer service. Women explained that if this were to change, strict boundaries for the client would have to be drawn on the company level, not by individual consultants. The culture in accepting and consenting to the desired working ways of client organisations' needs to be addressed by the whole company.

4.3.2 Autonomy can be challenging if not managed properly by workers

Even past the client business and the layer that other organisations oppose on conducting the contemporary ideal worker and organisational cultures, other issues are also still causing workers to overwork and burnout. If the work-life balance is supposedly great nowadays and workers can dictate their own working pace and find the balance between the two spheres themselves, why do some still continue to overwork and burnout? In addition to complying to the expectations of the clients, one issue raised by more than one interviewee was that this is just the pace that they are used to work at. It is not easy to slow down after years of pushing vigorously forward. One of my interviewees saw that it was also highly connected to their own personality, as she explained it:

> "It's in a way that you have just always learned to keep up that kind of working pace. And in some ways, it's also because I have always been a type of an achiever -person."

Reasons for overworking therefore, can run deep even when colleagues and the organisational culture would promote balance between work and family. For some, sense of achievement through the hours of working can still give the feeling of accomplishment, on a personal level. As the working culture promotes autonomy and encourages employees to dictate their own working pace and hours it raises new kinds of demands for the workers. As one further respondent stated:

> "This type of work structure where people decide themselves to dedicate a lot of their time to work instead of other domains, and do not control that balance well, can cause a lot of issues. People will get tired and frustrated because they feel like they do not have time to do all of the things that they should. They will burn out."

This suggests that when the organisation allows workers autonomy in their own work design the challenge of this balance is also on the shoulders of the workers, and inability to cope within these domains will reveal itself in the wellbeing of the workers.

4.3.3 The guys club is shutting the door on women

Even though, the world of technology consulting is increasingly inclusive and promotes diversity, the general implication from my interviews is that gender still matters. Regardless of all the open talk and discussion about how women are entering into the world of consulting and technology, there are still challenges beyond the numbers of underrepresentation. It seems that we are not yet completely past the time where gender is irrelevant. My interviewees shared their experiences and explained how especially the expectations are still high for some women in technology. Discussing the expectations for men and women, one of my interviewees found it as follows:

> "I believe that the target level is the same [for men and women], but if there comes up anything that constrains you from achieving that target, men are given more slack. It is more easily disregarded as external reasons, whereas for women it's easily raising doubt about whether you can do this or not."

Breaking down these old stereotypes connected to gender takes time. Sometimes, it is easier to simply adapt and conform to what has been accepted as a norm in society for decades. In other words, holding on to long-lasting, deeply rooted stereotypes. Talking

about gender stereotypes that these women had faced, many of my interviewee clearly saw that for example human-centricity and practicing of empathy comes more naturally for women. One of them even had seen men using this as an excuse:

> "In some cases, men go hide behind the fact they aren't human-centric. They're like 'I can't do this because I am a man. You do it because you are a woman!'"

Another interviewee had experienced men taking much less initiative in communication and dealing with conflict situations, compared to women. Men will rather outsource these traditionally female tasks:

> "I feel that sometimes men's way of solving - especially human-centric problems - is that they do not take any stance, they do not sit people down and talk and find out what is the issue. They prefer to outsource it."

Gender stereotypes can also easily result to continuing what has been proven to be acceptable. There are also instances that are still showing signs of favouring a certain behaviour, a behaviour that reinforces some of the toxic conventions of the past. Talking about the behaviours that really hurt workers and organisational cultures, one of my interviewee stated:

> "It's so common to hear that 'yeah, I know that person is kind of an asshole but they bring so much money into the house, so what?'."

The gender stereotypes and toxic behaviour is different between companies. In some companies, women talk that they have definitely seen it and in others it is more subtle. In instances, it seems that some of the desired behaviours are not directly connected to gender, but represented in the values traditionally typical for either men or women. One of my interviewees clearly felt the pain of not being valued as much for they personality as they would have wanted to:

> "They value a lot if you are very sociable and talkative. In general, I mean. Maybe sometimes they could listen to the ones who are more quiet, too. But I've noticed that the ones who are loud all the time and this driver-personality then of course they get more attention and they are considered as more professional somehow."

Fitting the ideal of the driver personality is not always easy, especially for all women in the technology industry. However, it is not only problematic for women specifically. And

women are experiencing this as problematic. One of my interviewees explained how they had themselves felt like it was easy to adapt into a culture that was more masculine and was looking for those driver -personalities, often possessed by men:

> "I've felt guilty because it was easy for me to fit into that masculine culture and work within it. It's the culture."

They had a strong experience of doing well and going forward, because their personality had matched well with what was expected of them. But knowing how it was in fact appraising the masculine culture, while perhaps arguably diminishing the female representation in the company, they felt guilty for it.

Another one of my interviewees also saw the driver-personality and being extrovert as a challenge, because even if it gives great opportunities and platform for people who possess these traits, the ones who are more reserved, calm and collected, might be left unheard:

> "We have quite a lot of people who I would say are quite extrovert. They necessarily might not yet have that much experience, but they can present their case so swiftly that it gives you the impression of real expertise. And in the background, I have been thinking, how much do we have people like me who are more quiet and are not talking all the time but might have much experience to base their thinking on?"

Based on the discussions with my interviewees, much of this phenomenon might be connected to how the technology industry initially started to shape as a gendered field. As one of my interviewees very straightforwardly put it:

> "When some of these companies have been put together it has been a bunch of guys. And they have then recruited bunch of guys. It leads to us still have these guys clubs in some places."

The guys clubs then are changing to all-gendered clubs, but the changes are slow, still challenged by underlying firmly grounded stereotypes. Even though, most of these stereotypes and presumptions about how women and men are different can be unconscious, they have real implications for the workers and working cultures.

4.3.4 The glass ceilings' remaining structures can still be visible

Even though, we are going towards a more inclusive workplace where women can thrive and advance too, the glass ceiling has not yet fully disappeared. It is claimed to be now easier to advance, however, it's still not a straightforward or an easy way up the ladder. This theme was discussed with all of my interviewees, hence a variety of opinions were raised into the discussion. One woman explained her past experiences about career progression path as follows:

> "Sometimes it has really felt like fighting against a real windmill for many years. And for a long time, I questioned myself for it. Am I really just stupid for not realising that something is wrong here? I just can't see how this can be a sensible solution. And then during the years I realised that I wasn't just stupid, but it just actually wasn't a sensible solution. There has been a really visible glass ceiling."

Being the odd one out can make one question. A long and rocky path can have an effect on how the worker sees their own competence. Therefore, if a worker in technology consulting is looking for clear progression path and advancement, it might still be more straightforward and better to be one with the homogeneous bunch. As one of my interviewees explained:

> "For partner and sales track in consulting it is in some industries easier to be a man because in principle, CEO's are men, a little older and from another generation."'

The way one sees their professional possibilities and future in the company has also considerable effects on how employees feel the sense of belonging in an organisation. One of my interviewees shared their experiences comparing how they had felt previously in a very male-dominated technology company, compared to where they were working now:

> "My previous workplace was so male-dominated and the whole board was kind of good friends with each other, all men in their forties. And a big reason why I started to feel like I might want to go somewhere else was that I realised if I wanted to advance and take another role, I should be a forty-something male. I don't know if it really holds true, maybe I could have driven myself that somehow. But it did have a massive effect that the organisation was led by

> such as homogeneous group of people, all from technology background, of certain age, of certain gender… It affects the organisational culture without a doubt. I did feel that there really strongly and even though I enjoyed myself there, I did feel like an outsider too."

When asking further how they had felt as an outsider, she said: "*outsider in a way that I didn't belong, or I just didn't have much common with others there*". Therefore, a visible glass ceiling in some organisations is still causing employees to switch working places, refocusing their individual contribution to another working culture, one that is more receptive to the inclusive and empathy-driven worker.

4.3.5 How women are part of the problem too

Another internal challenge that was raised by the discussions was concerning the working individuals themselves. It became clear that hindering the change to accepting new ways is not only up to the individuals who are oblivious or objecting change. Some of my interviewees described experiences and instances where they had also strongly felt that they too are a part of the problem, even though, they are conscious about their own actions in hindering the change. One interviewee explained her experiences of encountering uncomfortable situations and unwanted behaviours:

> "Sometimes I have to laugh at jokes that I do not find funny. And the problem is that I laugh at these things. It annoys me that if I say that it's not funny, then they think I am joking about it. It's kind of a difficult spot to be because you don't one to be the one who kind of ruins the party. You don't want to be the one who takes life too seriously."

It's a bigger deal to actually make a deal about it than just letting it slide. Being the one who always stand up in difficult situations can be tough and sometimes individuals might feel like it's not worth the fight because the person implicating some sort of toxic or unwanted behaviour or world views might not get it in the end to actually change their behaviour. And finally, it culminates to different personalities as it's not a common shared behaviour model but only reinforced in situations that are repeated occasionally. No matter how occasionally, some repetition has an effect.

Many interviewees shared the notion of feeling strained from acting as an ambassador. Although, it was a matter of passion and creating change, it is also demanding and sometimes exhausting. Rooting for the new values and change is tough, as one cannot put on a brave face all the time. In some ways one also has to be aware of their own actions and how their experiences have shaped their behaviour throughout the years. One of my interviewees shared how they had themselves realised how their own behaviour had played a role in reinforcing the structures and conventions hindering change:

> "I have also been a part of this problem because I grew in that wolf pack culture. I have had to adapt to that, so now I am repeating those lessons of how I advanced to the top in IT. I had to adapt and be the odd one constantly… It's really rough. I have had to adapt to what does good behaviour look like."

What was especially interesting here, is that these women who have climbed up the ladder and have been really successful, have in some places had to adapt and change themselves to 'fit that part'. And as it is a behavioural pattern that has been learned throughout the years, they have to then consciously learn how to turn back from that, how they can themselves have an effect on the future, how to promote these lessons learned for the next generation. This interviewee continued sharing a story about how they had explicitly guided the younger generation into continuing this path, only realising later, it was the wrong thing to do:

> "I had a group of students - who all happened to be female - coming to the office to present to our managing directors, who are all male. And so, I coached the students on how to present to the MDs. And instead of saying 'just be yourselves, you are the experts in this' I told them how to act to be believable in the eyes of these men. Do not wear makeup, wear only black clothes, use the word 'I' instead of 'we', use excessive hand gestures and remember your numbers. Instead of telling them to come as they are, I coached them how to be believable in the male IT-environment. Which is just fundamentally wrong in every way. And so, I realised, I was part of the problem there, too."

It is essential to be conscious about how one's actions can have an effect on the new generation, to help them not to reinforce these conventions of the past. Change therefore, needs efforts, it needs active discussion and increasing talk. However, sometimes it is

uncomfortable to fight for the things one believes in. One further example from my interviews was raised by a woman, who felt like even though she was definitely for gender diversity and diversity in general, rooting for inclusivity and representation of all minority groups, the discussion from time to time feels too heavy to take part in:

> "Sometimes I don't feel comfortable talking about gender diversity. It so easily goes into that feminism agenda or being stigmatised as bragging about that. Or complaining."

It is expected that women take part in fighting against these challenges, actively taking a stand and clearly getting their points across. If they are not, they can be seen as undermining their responsibilities, duties as women who have faced the tough phases and managed to climb on the other side. However, taking part in the discussion and being a changemaker is not always easy, and shouldn't fall for women only, bringing us to our sixth and final theme.

4.3.6 Societal and cultural structures as barriers for transformation

One of the most essential factors hindering workers from being authentic and carrying out their individual strengths and values at workplace is the fact that culture changes slowly. Interviewees described occasions where they can see representations of enforcing the old ways, instead of allowing the culture to change naturally. As often with cultural change, there is resistance. The same kind of values and traits have been highlighted in the culture of technology and business for decades. However, there is a counterforce which has started to fight back.

Talking about the masculine culture that my interviewees had more or less seen in their careers so far, we ended up talking largely about the values that these masculine working cultures reflected on a larger scale. One of my interviewees described the change they see, the transformation from the hard, masculine culture, to accepting and embracing the softer culture:

> "That kind of semi-aggressive forging ahead, which is traditionally a very masculine way of doing things, it is valued I would say. But then again, I can also see that there is a counterforce rising, that is creating a softer approach."

For cultural change to happen, it needs high levels of engagement from the employees, the employer and everyone involved in creating the company culture. Cultural change cannot be left either on individual champions or merely the upper level management. For genuine change, current conventions and profound beliefs need to be challenged from multiple different directions. One of my interviewees described the need for intervention to question the fundamental paradigms of many organisations as follows:

> "It's very common for people to think that your majority is the best in everything. So how can you break these deeply rooted paradigms that come from hunter-gatherer times when you simply had to attach yourself to that group thinking that would be the best way to survive? We need interventions on these ancient sentiments, on all different levels. It can't be only that leadership is taking part. Leadership needs to show an example, but everyone needs to get involved."

Therefore, to be open-minded, receptive to change and willingness to find new ways, commitment is needed from all levels of the organisation. Being open and willing to adapt seemed to be a value praised by especially many of my younger interviewees. My interviews suggest that the slow change is about generations too. The new generation, just entering to the workforce is eagerly bursting bubbles of stereotypes and questioning the ways of working. Furthermore, it is not only the individuals bringing in new values, but whole organisations that are built from these individuals with innovate ways of thinking. One of my interviewees described how they saw the hierarchical structures as barriers for the cultural change:

> "It's the hierarchical structure we are used to working in. The new generation companies are really breaking these structures a lot. I feel like the big difference is between generations."

However, these structures are still deeply rooted in our society, how we see the roles of men and women in our day to day lives and how different values and genders are portrayed in society. What are the roles we have assigned specifically to each gender? This is partly why the problem of creating more inclusive working cultures has also external reinforcements. One woman explained how she sees the barriers of societal structures even in current culture as one of the structures changing the slowest:

> "I think that the biggest challenges lie in our predominant societal structures. In every aspect we have the assumption that women should take care of children and whenever for example they are late from school, go to detention or so, the teachers will always call the mother. So, I think that a lot of these structures in our society are still pushing the meta work for women."

Therefore, to allow the culture to change not only the companies need individuals who are embracing fresh and open-minded sets of values, but furthermore, the stiff and profound societal structures need change too. This suggests that as long as there is reinforcement from old structures in individuals, organisations, and society, barriers and challenges will be faced before transformation towards a more inclusive workplace where women as ideal worker can thrive as well.

Table 5 A summary of findings describing the hindrances of the new ideal

Conventions and behaviours that hinder the new ideal	
Narrative by respondents	Demands of the client-facing role
	Challenges of autonomy
	The guys club shutting the door on women
	Glass ceiling's remaining structures
	Women's burden as change agents
	Societal and cultural structures

5 DISCUSSION

In this fifth chapter I will discuss the findings of my research and aim to make connections to the existing literature, opened up in chapter two. As presented previously, scholars have over the past decades developed theories and models striving to grasp why women are still widely unrepresented and experiencing stalled advancement in many industries. This study's aim was to contribute to the current academic discussion by uncovering deeper level impacts behind the underrepresentation of women in male-gendered industries, specifically in technology consulting, the intersection of technology and business. Next I will discuss my contributions to the theory based on the findings of my qualitative research.

5.1 The ideal worker 2020

The findings presented in chapter four have shed light on the ideal worker image that women in the technology consulting industry are experiencing today. The narrative that I have constructed through my interviewees' shared experiences showcases the ideal worker of 2020 as someone who is determined, willing to challenge themselves and take risks. This is in concur with the traditional ideal worker image, as male-gendered traits such as assertiveness and confidence to perform have been in the center when striving for efficiency. However, the mentality described today by my interviews indicates that the driver -ability is not an intrinsic value of efficiency without a purpose. A key success factor for the modern ideal worker is to be versatile and able to adapt, therefore, being highly aware of the surrounding context and focusing on connected relationships inside and outside the organisation.

Strongly evident from the data of my study is the emphasis and understanding of human activities. Being able to form meaningful connections and conversations and having a positive effect on colleagues, customers and the workers themselves speaks for the increased understanding of emotional intelligence. These values of human-centricity and empathy have traditionally been associated with female traits such as communality and caring. Therefore, these findings are conflicting with the old ideal worker image, fostering the external parts of the organisation. In the traditional ideal worker image employees are merely expected to contribute to the financial outputs of the company, disregarding the internal needs of the people as distracting from the work itself.

The values that my interviews have clearly reflected in their statements show that the ambitions for systematic advancement and career progression are decreasing as compared to the existing literature. What matters more now in the working context for individuals is the substance of the work, the connections made in the workplace and meaningfulness of the specific tasks and projects led by these individuals. This suggests that the worker's value is increasing from the past ideal worker image, as having more say over one's own work tasks and taking issues and tough questions forward as well. Considering the old ideal worker image, this would concur with the traits of assertiveness and self-interest, however, the image my interviewees have constructed show that this assertiveness culminates strongly to how the individuals truly see themselves and value themselves. Therefore, they are not expected to be shaped by the organisation and to be casted in a predetermined role, but instead, encouraged to find their own strengths and weaknesses, and develop them further.

The traditional ideal worker image was primarily supported by the notion that to succeed in passing as ideal, work should be the singular focus of an employee. However, my data shows that on the contrary to the old image, organisations today are looking for individuals with 'a healthy work-life balance', meaning that work is only one domain in their lives, not necessarily less important but not required to be more important either. This point is one of the most substantial differences found in this study between the traditional worker and the worker in 2020. The relationship between the work and life domains is *co-existing*.

Therefore, my first contribution to the theory and existing literature is that, when previously the traditional ideal worker image has been dictated by the organisation and its focus has been on external orientation, the image of an ideal worker today, is dictated by the workers and the people in the organisation with a higher focus on internal orientation and integration.

5.2 Working culture created, recreated and sustained by workers

This study has further reinforced the linkage between culture and the ideal worker image. Especially, working culture in this researched context seems to be formed through the lived experiences, reflection and human activity executed by the members of the organisation.

Therefore, as Reid (2011) stated, culture is created, recreated and sustained by workers themselves.

My data shows evidence of increased human-centricity through organisational cultures' encouragement and desire for authenticity in leadership, efforts to building psychologically safe working environments and support for a sustainable working pace. Moreover, compared to the past where the singular focus of the workers was considered to be merely work and external outputs, more space is now made for genuine encounters and for being mindful and present. In this new organisational space, showing emotions is allowed and encouraged. Inclusion is gaining momentum inside organisations by increased attention to diversity and promoting individualism.

Simultaneously, motivation, enthusiasm and inspiration are ascending from the content and substance of the work itself. These values are characterising workers as taking their work selves into their own hands and shaping it according to their own needs and desires, reflecting that non-work identities and work identities are negotiable for the workers themselves. Taking high ownership of their work and how they are expecting to be conducting this work, members of the organisations are not conforming to predetermined roles and are expecting the same from their colleagues and leaders. In my opinion, this speaks for the high respect of self and others, knowing the value of the worker. Authority is shown through this lens of respect for the individual and their true selves, not from titles, glory and fame. As members of the organisations are not hiding behind their work selves but letting their authentic, even non-work identities show, allows members to be more direct towards each other even to the point where challenging, raising concerns, and calling issues into question are positive for the development of the organisational culture.

Even though, this study is showing evidence of the organisations encouragement to blur the lines between the non-work identities and work identities of their members, work still does not equal the same as the self of the worker. Failing at work does not mean that one is failing as a person. This notion is allowing more freedom, flexibility and autonomy to the worker by letting them define and regulate their work identities themselves. In this organisational culture workers can use their own individual strengths, whether they represent more traditional organisational values or a softer, traditionally more feminine approach. Therefore, this study is indicating that organisational culture in this researched context is presenting a dual set of values as the previously undermined softer side has

gained foothold next to the traditionally highlighted harder accent of strictly business, consequently, contributing to the shaping of idealised image of the worker.

Overall, my second contribution to the academic discussion attests that the working culture in this research context is novel in a sense that organisations are showing dualism in their set of values by embracing a softer human-centric approach next to the traditional hard-core values of business.

5.3 The working culture and ideal worker through the CVF

The traits and abilities of both the ideal worker and the working culture discussed with the interviewees in the studied context, give space to the interpretation of these topics through the lens of the competing values framework (CVF, Hartnell et. al, 2011), presented in the second chapter. As the CVF reflects the values that are created, recreated and sustained in the organisational culture, the characteristic to the image and construction of the ideal worker and values designated to that of a desired employee give clues about the organisational culture type. Reflecting on the literature and the traditional concept of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990), I will next explain how the ideal worker shows itself through the competing values framework, illustrated in Figure 6.

The ideal worker image narrated by my interviewees is not dictated by the organisation but rather its focus is on internal orientation. The assumption that this culture builds its foundation on is that human affiliation results to members of the organisation behaving appropriately through increased trust, loyalty and feelings of high engagement. The emphasis is on building sustainable collaboration through effective and supportive teamwork, high levels of participation and open communication. These values of an ideal worker as a facilitator of human attachment and affiliation are therefore, demonstrating the clan culture type for the organisation.

On the other hand, the ideal worker image described through the statements of my interviewees also characterise the working culture as fostering for growth, high levels of autonomy and variety. The behaviours that are desired for individuals include creativity, adaptability and willingness to take risks. Therefore, these organisational factors are suggesting towards beliefs that the shared beliefs inside the organisation including

understanding the importance and significance of the substance of work, and the impact of the work itself.

This indicates that the organisations' cultural type is highly tilted towards the flexibility and discretion axis of the competing values framework. However, looking at these characteristics of cultural type further into the CVF, I argue, that the organisational culture in this researched context shows evidence of a dichotomy between two organisational culture types, clan culture and adhocracy culture. This narrated culture is presenting effectiveness criteria focused at the same time around employee satisfaction and commitment while simultaneously investing heavily in creating a culture of innovation and transformation. I suggest, that this division between the two culture types is another demonstration of valuing dualism and balance. As presented in the theoretical framework at the end of chapter two, the traditional image of the ideal worker has previously been heavily descriptive of the market organisational culture type. However, the findings of my study are presenting an image of the ideal worker through the organisational culture types of clan and adhocracy cultures.

Therefore, this study finds that the image constructing the ideal worker as focused on human affiliation and innovation, is significantly differing from the traditional ideal worker image that is focused on efficiency and achievement.

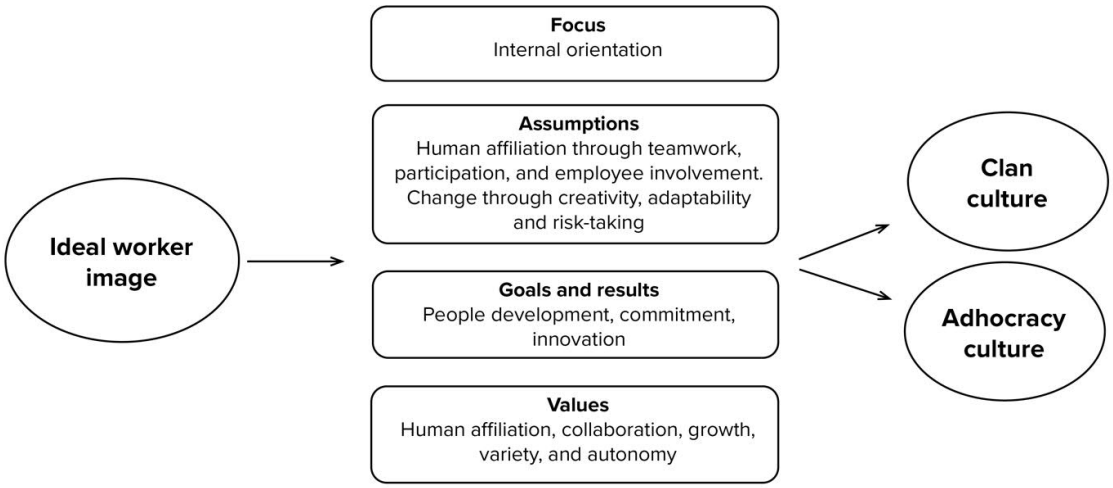

Figure 6 The ideal worker image's dichotomy of organisational culture types

5.4 Women still as a minority

The data and analysis of this study has aimed for finding how the ideal worker and the organisational culture in the researched context is receptive to women and their fit to this ideal image. The evidence of my study suggests that as the perception of the ideal worker image, the fundamental grounds which the organisational culture is shaping on, is changing, hence the opportunities and values of this novel organisational culture are clearing space for women to explore and reveal their true identities at work. In other words, women are allowed to express values of communality, emotions and caring for human affiliation, which in the past were idealised for them only outside of the work domain.

One key finding stemming from the interviews in this study was the search for belongingness and understanding that the feeling of support and encouragement from colleagues and organisations should outweigh perceptions and roles of gender. This suggests that the previously presented theories of differences between genders and clearly assigned gender roles as the reason for the underrepresentation of women would be losing their foothold. Similarly, as the organisations are embracing a new direction of sustainable working pace and a coexisting relationship between work and life domains, this study is further refuting these theories as the sole explanation for the lack of women in the technology workforce.

However, my findings on the new ideal worker image propose that there are still behaviours from the past that are hindering the shift to the new ideal worker and organisational culture type of clan and adhocracy. Therefore, it is worth considering whether these deeply grounded conventions are sustaining the academically established gender inequality in the workplaces, and consequently, having an effect on women's underrepresentation and experiences as minority in the intersection of business and technology. In this context, my study contends that the behaviour reinforcing the conventions of the market culture type is, as Reid (2015) corroborates, letting men pass as ideal workers while women are struggling to conform to the ideal image constructed and recreated through the organisational culture. This behavioural model is therefore, continuing to push women out of the work domain.

Especially, important for this study's context has been the finding the barrier from the client-facing role, characterising for the consulting industry. The pressure to be ideal

worker in a client-facing role is hardwired in the very design of the work, which routinely for example expects stretching to working evenings and weekends (Perlow & Kelly, 2014). This additional working environment is demonstrating a demand for women, and all workers who are essentially experiencing a conflict between their true identities and the required work identity dictated by the client, to resist and seek for inverting (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013) the pressures to conform and assent to these undesired identities. These management strategies are ultimately hurting workers' experiences of not only their work identities but their personal wellbeing, and further, organisational productivity, efficiency and transformations of power relations, such as autonomy. This study implies therefore, that moving from the market culture to the clan and adhocracy culture means that work identity management cannot be in conflict for workplaces to create not only a psychologically safe space for both genders but furthermore, a productive and innovative organisational culture.

As the existing literature has strived to understand the remaining question of why women's representation has not reflected our current understanding of diversity and inclusion in the workforce of especially male-gendered industries, perhaps this study can respond to the calls of increasing gender equality. Regardless of the identified new characteristics of a contemporary ideal worker image, I have still found evidence of barriers for women's fit to male-gendered organisations and industries, and their established stalled advancement (Armstrong et al. 2007).

Finally, my fourth contribution to the existing academic discussion is to show that the values and behaviours fostering the traditional ideal worker image (Acker, 1990) and the market culture type (Hartnell et. al, 2011), are diminishing women's satisfaction, commitment and consequently, their presentation in the workforce.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Research summary

This study has strived to uncover implications for women as minority in the extensively discussed domain of diversity in technology workforce through the ideal worker image. Furthermore, the organisational culture was reviewed as a key focus and structure reflecting on the values constructed and sustained by the organisation's image on the ideal worker, and the culture types the organisations reflect through the competing values framework. As existing literature has still been unable to fully understand the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women and their stalled advancement, this study has contributed to the academic discussion through four contributions. The following findings propose that the underrepresentation of women and the barriers to their inclusion in the workforce are due to the remains of the traditional ideal worker image, acting as a barrier to the transformation of a novel organisational culture that is more receptive to women's success and advancement in the work domain.

The results of this study underscore that the ideal worker image is shifting orientation from external to internal and rather than dictated by the organisation itself, created together by the people taking part in human action. This novel organisational culture is showing evidence of embracing dualism in their set of values by fostering a softer side of human-centricity while rooting for the harder core values of growth and autonomy. Consequently, the ideal worker image created, recreated and sustained through this new organisational culture type as focused on human affiliation and innovation, is located at the other spectrum in respect to the traditional ideal worker image reflecting the market culture in the competing values framework. These transformations and shifts in the ideal worker image and the organisational culture type are only fully creating more space for women in the workforce when challenges created by the remaining structures and behaviours of the reflections from the past can be overcome.

6.2 Practical implications

In addition to the academic contributions offered in this study, my research suggests also important practical insights. To take full ownership of the desires to move towards diverse and inclusive organisations, and improve the representation of women in the workforce, I suggest managerial implications as follows:

- **Cultural transformation**: To change the roles assigned to different genders, cultural transformation is in key position. Members of the organisation often endeavour to adapt into the surrounding environment and therefore, the organisations can significantly increase the balance at workplaces by embracing the cultural values of human affiliation and innovation.
- **Help for soft values from social sciences**: Social sciences and other epistemological assumptions highlighting the importance of human-centricity and emotional intelligence can bring substantially new and innovative perspectives to discuss in technology and business. When these values are explored further, women will also be more receptive to assent as their identity management strategy at the workplace. These areas of science can also expand worldviews and the foundation for understanding tremendously and therefore, increase the possibilities for using the products and services created by the technology industry into real purpose.
- **Role modelling**: Taking steps towards increasing gender equality at workplaces, this study highlights the importance of authentic role modelling. For organisations to gain both higher levels of employee wellbeing as well as competitive advantage from increased diversity and inclusion, bringing not only women as role models but real and authentic people for women and all genders in technology can help.
- **Sustainable ways of working with the client**: The technology industry is showing signs of valuing sustainable working hours, paces and lifestyles internally, however, paying extra attention to extending these practices to customer-oriented roles and activities can significantly advance the transformation of the organisational culture type. This shift can require setting new rules and rethinking the very design of client-facing work.
- **True embrace for diversity**: Because skills and ways of thinking are not distributed evenly, before there is the underlying assumption that authentic diversity in thinking is embraced, values of human affiliation and creativity are hard to achieve. Rather than forcing people - whether men or women - to conform

to be different or think differently or specifically, to lean in, fostering authentic diversity does not need a culture that requires anyone to lean in.

6.3 Limitations and evaluation of the study

Due to the nature of a qualitative study and its leaning on generalisations (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008), much of this study's analysis is based on these specific case-like presentations of real-life situations from the interviewees. As with any generalisation, it is unclear how much of these incidents can be exceptional in a way that is uncommon. To avoid uncertainty of any specific statement holding true in a bigger picture, this study has aimed to build a holistic unified picture of the research problem and larger phenomenon. Instead of focusing on individual incidents and situations, questionable in reliability, my intent throughout this study has been to build a bigger puzzle, not dependent on any isolated event in history. This study is about experiences, and as such, it will not disregard or neglect any experiences faced by the interviewees, while acknowledging that these views are subjective and might not hold true for every woman working in technology industry or describe every organisational environment in this field.

The qualitative method in this research has allowed the openness and flexibility of the research proposal (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008), which has further enabled how the data, analysis, and researcher's interpretation affected one another throughout the process. In my analysis I have wanted to highlight the fact that language, words and speech produced by my interviewees are all constructing a larger story, a social reality. This acknowledgement stems from the notion that language is not neutral but used by people as an intermediate, hence making language functional in building different versions of our social reality (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008). In the end, throughout this research I have aimed to treat these qualitative methods as the tools that they, highlighting that the phenomenon addressed here is more important to consider and to frame the discussion against.

What has made this research even more important in my own eyes is the fact that each and every one of my interviewees felt passionate about this research problem, which already is a validation as such. At the same time, the subject of the study has been interesting and familiar to the researcher but remained mysterious enough for me to keep distance and provide a versatile perspective.

The methodological decisions of this study impose also limitations for this study, and therefore, other research designs and methodological assumptions might be able to uncover findings and implications that diverge from the equivalents presented in this study. Utilising semi-structured interviews as the sole source of data can be argued to offer a subjectivist point of view, specifically defined in the interactional situation of conducting the interview. However, as this study particularly aimed to depict the lived experiences and views of the respondents, painting a holistic picture was relevant as a social construct built at this specific point in time. Nevertheless, research conducted during a longer time period could have found other meaningful insights for the topic.

Regardless of the level of the researcher's awareness of biases, to certain extent my own personal feelings and experiences outside of the research context will always impress upon this study. Therefore, acknowledging the fact that the researcher's subjective perception and varying affinity for the respondents can have an effect on the study result is important.

The sample size of my data set could have also presented more well-grounded evidence when conducted in a larger scope. Larger data set could have also allowed characterising the technology industry and the experienced worker image on even a more generalised level. Additionally, the respondents' nature of knowledge work can have an impact on how much these experts take ownership of their own work and working environments. Other job tasks and organisational functions could yield different results than proposed by this study. Finally, conducting similar research from the men's point of view could change the narrative suggested here.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

The interviews conducted have only touched the surface of the research that is to be continued. More interviews are needed to find deeper connections to the underlying reasons proposed in the existing academic discussion. The findings of this study suggest that social sciences are gaining momentum in technology and business context, and thus, I would encourage exploring the intersection of these further. Specifically, I would be interested to know more about the possible advantage that women can draw from their tendency for human-centricity, empathy and emotional intelligence. These areas of human

affiliation especially will be of increasing interest as the future of work is shaping to lie heavily on these topics. In the future then, maybe, it would be possible to finally overcome the long-standing issue of female underrepresentation in male-gendered industries through the changing demands of work, and therefore, the values embraced in organisational cultures.

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8 APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guideline

Women as minority in technology

- How do you feel about gender equality at your workplace? How? In what kind of situations do you experience gender equality/gender inequality at your workplace? Why?
- Does your employer and colleagues treat men and women differently at your workplace? How? In what kind of situations? Why?
- Have you noticed differences between your current employer and previous employers? What kind of differences? In what kind of situations? Why?

Gender roles and differences between genders

- What is your experience on gender roles as a woman in technology consulting? What kind of expectations are set on women in technology consulting? Can you describe a specific moment or situation where you have especially experienced this? How? Why?
- Have you experienced that you have been treated differently you're your male colleagues? How? Why? Can you describe a specific moment or situation where you have felt this? Where do you think this sort of behaviour comes from?
- Have you ever experienced that your gender has had an effect on what you are expected of at your workplace? How? Why? How does that make you feel?

Work and family/life

- How do you experience the divide between work and free time? In what kind of situations have you experienced this? Why?
- Have you ever experienced that there are different expectations for men and women between work and free time? In what kind of situations have you experienced this? Why?
- Have you ever experienced that family life has had an effect on your work life? Can you give examples of how? Why were these moments or situations meaningful?
- Have you ever experienced that not only family life but also being a mother has affected your opportunities at workplace? How? Why?

Leadership and advancement

- Have you ever experienced that your gender would have had an effect on your possibilities to advance at your workplace? Can you describe a specific moment or situation where you have felt this? What do you think are the causes for this and why?

- Have you ever felt that these experiences have had an effect on your work motivation or performance at your workplace? How? Why?
- Have you ever felt that your experiences in these moments and situations have had an effect on your career? How? Why?

Future of women in technology consulting

- Do you ever feel like you have had significant say over these moments and situations? How? Why? Do you think they will have an effect in the future? How? Why? Do you think they have an effect on your work community? How? Why?
- What do you see as the key changes to improve women's position and representation in technology consulting? How? Why?
- How do you see women's position in technology consulting in Finland now and in the future compared to other countries? How? Why? How do you see it changing in the future? How? Why?

Appendix B: First order codes

#	1st order codes	Frequency
1	Seeking for balance between soft and hard values	14
2	Embracing diversity in organisational culture	13
3	Soft values are sometimes harder to prove in hard core business	12
4	Women have much more soft topics in their corner	12
5	Authenticity and leaders being their true selves	11
6	Conforming to a culture that fosters masculine values	11
7	Gender diversity has an effect on the end solutions, services and products	10
8	Expectations for women are higher	9
9	Seeking for constant self-development	9
10	More than gender, the culture and its values are important	9
11	Men are less human-centric than women	9
12	Adaptability and versatility as a good trait	9
13	Being enthusiastic and energetic as a good trait	9
14	Looking at each person in the organisation as an individual	9
15	Environment is favourable to driver personalities	8
16	Being interested in the substance of the work rather than advancement	8
17	Worker shouldn't be forced to a predetermined role or characteristic	8
18	Working culture does not idealise over-working	8
19	Genuine connections and encounters between people	8
20	Women are more empathetic	8
21	Being an authentic version without acting a certain way because someone demands that	7
22	Presuming that there is an absolute answer to all problems is a problem	7
23	Minimised authority between hierarchical levels	7
24	As a woman you have to take a strict role to be believable	7
25	Healthy work-life balance is something that the organisation values	7
26	Work and family are often more in conflict with women than men	7
27	To change gender roles, culture needs to change	7
28	Traditional feminine/soft values are now more widely acceptable in technology	7
29	Taking action for changing the culture	7
30	Setting own boundaries for working	7
31	Sustainable way of working	7
32	Making others feel good	7
33	Recruiting women is difficult	6
34	Technology is very networking based	6
35	Money is still a top priority sometimes overriding the human side of the business	6
36	Authenticity in co-workers	6
37	Feeling guilty about fitting well into the male-gendered organisational culture	6
38	Self-confidence vs. pursuing self-interest	6
39	Understanding for balancing work and family life	6

40	Ingenuine role models do not work	6
41	Admiring professional expertise and knowledge of substance	6
42	Empathy in leaders	6
43	Work and non-work identity as one	6
44	Breaking stereotypes	6
45	Harder traditional values are important too	6
46	Defining your own working hours and pace	6
47	Feelings of inclusion and involvement are beneficial for all individuals, teams and organisations	6
48	Repeating learned behaviour models that are hurtful	6
49	Making a difference means strategic shifts	5
50	Gender roles are hurtful for men too	5
51	Assertiveness in women is not attractive	5
52	Men sometimes get a free pass where women do not	5
53	Accepting that I do not know the answer, let's find out	5
54	Role modelling does not have to be assigned to gender	5
55	Motivation comes from your own work	5
56	Organisations are giving out an impression that they have gender diversity handled but they don't	5
57	Pushing constantly forward is the way they have been used to work in technology	5
58	Working hours spilling over because customer needs it	5
59	Balancing the environment according to what is needed	5
60	Generations are showing different values	5
61	Awareness of gender diversity is essential	5
62	Clients are often only older men	5
63	Men's struggle in showing their emotional side	5
64	Colleagues as role models	5
65	Work shouldn't be the singular focus of the worker	5
66	Empathy as a strength	5
67	Environment that allows open discussion	5
68	Clients expectations for working	5
69	Making space for others	5
70	There aren't enough women	4
71	Unconscious bias	4
72	Trying to bring out human-centricity and humility in leaders	4
73	Being naturally driven and taking responsibility of executing	4
74	Women are less likely to possess the driver ability	4
75	Lack of role models	4
76	Interest for the specific projects and learning from them	4
77	Integrity in role models	4
78	Motivation comes from your colleagues and work community	4
79	Purely gender is not experienced as an issue	4
80	Work culture can oppose significant problems for change	4
81	Autonomy can also be challenging	4

82	Men and their egos	4
83	Work and life domains as equally important	4
84	Switch on/off time	4
85	Competence is more important than gender	4
86	Taking risks and trying new things	4
87	Concerns about family and work conflicting in the future	4
88	Being transparent about mistakes	4
89	Attracting a-likes	4
90	Seeking to attract women in recruitment	3
91	Higher levels of the organisation are not reflecting gender equality numbers	3
92	Experience of women leaders favouring men	3
93	Thoughts about the future career and changing to another profession	3
94	Walking the talk	3
95	Your work should speak for itself	3
96	Raising concerns is key for healthy company culture	3
97	Men are better at taking risks than women	3
98	People will leave if they are not satisfied	3
99	Experiences of others being very narrow in their mindset	3
100	Workers expectations of the values in the organisation	3
101	Thinking that stalled advancement is your own fault	3
102	Men's struggle in taking time for family	3
103	Overworking as part of personality	3
104	Clients are occasionally assigning traditional gender roles for men and women	3
105	Women have a natural tendency for emotional work	3
106	People around you want you to succeed	3
107	Inclusive culture is better for business performance	3
108	Being really proactive and speaking up	2
109	Some people are still denying that there is an issue of gender inequality	2
110	Lower levels of the organisation are showing gender equality in numbers	2
111	How you raise concerns into question is important	2
112	Talking about gender diversity can sometimes feel like a burden	2
113	Gender diversity is a sensitive topic	2
114	How the promises of gender equality are realising in daily action and routines	2
115	Shifting to technology is easy	2
116	Identity conflicting with what is expected of the worker at work	2
117	Allowing' someone to the inner circle	2
118	Men are naturally quicker than women	2
119	Going forward is easy when you are strict	2
120	Authority as micromanaging	2
121	New generation companies are breaking boundaries	2
122	Not afraid to ask hard questions and facing conflict	2
123	Upper level management's support is important	2
124	Failing at work is not the same as failing as a person	2

125	Learning is a life long process	2
126	Feelings of exclusion	2
127	Pressure from clients to deliver	2
128	Worker's autonomy in defining their own work tasks and creative work	2
129	Organisations' members building a community	2
130	Teaching equality	1
131	Being willing to be flexible and understand others to a certain point	1
132	Being a woman can be perceived as unprivileged and as lack of power	1
133	Looking for and being open to new perspectives that you can use for your work	1
134	Skills and ways of thinking are different for different genders	1
135	Forcing people who do not feel comfortable to lean in	1
136	Experiences of being judged for being too human-centric	1
137	Technology industry is very liberal	1
138	Technology is connected to the society	1
139	Being different all the time is hard	1
140	Future of work requires diversity	1
141	Ways of working are just as important as your concrete work skills or competence	1
142	Reflecting diversity and inclusion in upper management levels	1
143	Team members need to be able to trust each other	1
144	Culture of constant feedback	1
145	Societal structures are sometimes difficult to overcome	1